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Socrates - Counselor of *Phobos*: A Commentary on Plato's *Laches*

by

Anas Walid Muwais ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Political Science

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Dr. Leon H. Craig, Supervisor.

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Dr. Earle H. Waugh.

Date: 27 July 99

This work is dedicated to my father, a man whose courage has borne testimony to the strength, beauty, and sincerity of the human spirit when animated by love and faith. His example shall forever live as the standard to which I aspire.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical commentary on Plato's dialogue *Laches*. Applying Plato's own rules for good writing reflexively, special emphasis is paid to the drama of the dialogue and its relationship to the written words. Being ostensibly on courage, the dialogue is examined with an eye to fully explicating Plato's view on the question: what is courage (both 'moral' and 'intellectual')? However, equally important -- and in fact related to the question -- is the topic of pedagogy. Though beginning by taking Socrates at his word that he does not have insight into the topic of pedagogy or know the answers to the questions he himself raises, the thesis ends by showing that Socratic pedagogy relies fundamentally on teaching by example as well as learning through negation and dialectic examination.

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I would like to begin by thanking my mother, Fatiyeh Hazimeh Muwais, and my father, Walid Kassim Abu-Muwais, for bearing with me as I wrote this thesis, but most especially for their life-long encouragement to excel in all things good. I also thank my sister Rola for her aid in typing this thesis, and my siblings collectively (Osama, Rana, and Rola) for their interest in my work.

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I: *INTRODUCTION*

In several respects, a general introduction and summary of the *Laches* ought to facilitate this commentary, presuming as it does a thorough familiarity with the dialogue that few readers can reasonably be expected to have. Hence, it is best to remind the reader of the dialogue in its entirety, thus eliminating the need for constant referral to the text itself. Furthermore, though one attempts to deal with the dialogue's themes and questions as they arise, allowing the dialogue to unfold itself, so to speak, it often proves exceedingly difficult (if not impossible) to do philosophic justice to the text in this way. Consequently, a brief summary can serve as a convenient 'back-drop' to the interpretation itself, allowing easier reference to events elsewhere in the dialogue where pertinent in the examination.

Most germane in this respect is the dialogue's ostensible topic of courage[1]. For curiously enough, the actual theme of courage does not explicitly arise until just past the center of the dialogue. However, if one accepts the especially challenging task of learning everything the dialogue has to teach about courage, one must look at the entire dialogue with an eye towards what light it might throw on this theme; and this despite the fact that roughly the first one-third of the dialogue deals most specifically with a topic which seems to go nowhere, literally disappearing from the dialogue just past its center: fighting in armor.

Lastly, the *Laches* is particularly difficult for the further reason that its principle interlocutors are all historical persons. Indeed, and especially

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[1]Here and throughout, one must keep in mind that the Greek word for courage (*andreia*) literally means *manliness*.

apt for a dialogue on courage, Nicias and Laches are rival generals in the Athenian army -- in fact, Nicias is the most prominent political leader of Athens in the period in which the dialogue is set -- and an acquaintance with both men's roles in Greek history is a necessary correlate to any adequate interpretation of the dialogue. With the exception of Socrates, a brief historical survey of the dialogue's principle interlocutors is provided in this introduction, and further facts concerning them are brought to light throughout the inquiry where appropriate.

II: SUMMARY OF THE "LACHES"

The *Laches* begins with four men, Lysimachus, Melesias, Nicias and Laches, having been to a "spectacle" of one of the new sciences of military fighting: *hoplomachia,* literally, 'fighting in armor'. The two renowned generals, Nicias and Laches, have been asked to view a demonstration of fighting in armor performed by a certain Stesilaus (who is willing to teach the science for a fee) because the two old men are in need of frank counsel. They want to know if their children, Aristides the son of Lysimachus, and Thucydides the son of Melesias, should learn this fighting in armor, or if not, any other thing which the generals believe would make them as good as possible. Nicias and Laches pleasantly agree to give frank counsel, but Laches wonders why they have not asked Socrates for counsel, since he is from Lysimachus' *deme*, or, 'tribal district', of the Athenian city-state, and further, he is always attending the places where youths pursue nobility. Impressed with Laches' and then Nicias' praise of Socrates, Lysimachus claims to have been a life-long friend of Socrates' father Sophroniscus, and asks as a paternal friend for

Socrates' counsel as to whether or not fighting in armor should be learned by the youths.

Socrates politely responds that if he has anything to add he will give his opinion after the two older generals give theirs. Nicias responds first, praising fighting in armor for its skill and grace, considering that it can add to one's confidence and courage, and believing it to be a 'spring-board' for other ambitious pursuits of nobility. Laches, however, considers fighting in armor useless, even questioning whether it is a 'science' at all. He points out that the Spartans, who are practically obsessed with martial pursuits, and with whom Athens is presently at war, do not practice it, and that the teachers of it avoid Sparta religiously on account of this. Furthermore, he points out that its practitioners never become famous, and that he has seen this very Stesilaus make a fool of himself in battle. For these reasons and others, he says that it should not be learned, adding that Socrates should give his opinion on the matter.

Lysimachus asks Socrates to cast the deciding vote, but Socrates objects that knowledge and not democratic principles should settle the issue. In this case, he suggests the real issue is the youths' souls and thus they should see which of them is an expert in the care of the soul, whether they have been taught the art or have discovered it on their own. Claiming not to qualify in either respects himself, Socrates proposes that Nicias and Laches be questioned by Lysimachus. Lysimachus agrees, but adds that he would prefer Socrates undertake the examination. Nicias tells Lysimachus that it is clear that he knows Socrates only from the latter's youth, since a conversation with Socrates is never about what was originally intended, but rather Socrates forces his interlocutors to give an account of themselves, the way they have lived and the way they are at

present living. Nicias claims to be well experienced with Socrates' methods, adding that he is perfectly willing to be examined by him and asks Laches' as to his willingness. Laches attests that Socrates earned the right to talk about noble things when he proved his virtue at the battle of Delium (in which he and Socrates together retreated from Delium), and thus he is willing to have Socrates scrutinize him.

Socrates tells the men that he knows of another sort of examination that will lead to the same thing as the one concerning expertise on educating youths: they should examine which of them know what virtue is, since one would not know how to educate a soul in virtue if they did not even know what virtue itself is. But Socrates suggests that rather than take on the perhaps over large problem of defining all of virtue, they should attempt to define a part, namely, courage, this being the virtue which fighting in armor seems to aim at instilling in its practitioners. Finally, after more than one-half of the dialogue has already transpired, the topic of courage is explicitly addressed.

Laches is confident that he can define courage, but through a series of questions Socrates obliges him to change his definition from simple willingness to remain in the ranks and not to flee from the battle, to the seemingly absurd conclusion that courage is foolish steadfastness. Faced with this unacceptable result, Laches admits his *aporia*, or, perplexity. Laches is irritated with himself on account of his inability to state in speech what he is sure that he perceives in his mind. But he claims that a "love of victory" concerning the argument has taken hold of him and that he will not give up until he can say what courage is.

Socrates and Laches now turn to Nicias for help in defining courage. Nicias, who has often heard Socrates say that people are good in those

things of which they are wise and bad in those things of which they are unlearned, claims that courage must be a certain wisdom. Despite Laches' objections that Nicias' position is absurd, Socrates proceeds to question Nicias with the intention of understanding him better. At the conversations conclusion, Socrates leads Nicias to agree that he, in fact, believes courage to be the knowledge of good and evil. But this, Socrates argues, would be the whole of virtue, whereas they have been discussing courage with an explicit understanding that courage is but a *part* of virtue (along with moderation, justice, and other such things). Nicias thus concedes that they have not found what courage is. Laches thereupon proceeds to mock Nicias for his apparent failure, but Nicias replies in kind while insisting that he spoke suitably and that, if he did say anything wrong, it can easily be remedied with the help of Damon and others with whom he associates, adding that he will then teach the obviously needful Laches.

With their examination into courage acknowledged to be a failure, Nicias and Laches counsel Lysimachus and Melesias to have Socrates educate their children, to which Lysimachus wholeheartedly agrees. But Socrates claims to be no more a suitable candidate for this job than either Nicias or Laches: for they are all, he claims, equally ignorant as to the relevant issues. Socrates concludes by counseling that all of them should eagerly seek out a teacher through whom they can overcome their ignorance, adding that if anyone ridicules them for seeking teachers at their age they should use Homer as their defense, who said that it is not good for shame to be present in a needy man. Lysimachus agrees to take Socrates' counsel, adding that they shall meet the next morning at dawn. Socrates agrees to come the following morning if god is willing.

III: HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

The following interpretation of the *Laches* observes the recommendations of the late Leo Strauss, whereby both the *logos* (i.e., rational speech) and the *ergon* (i.e., action, or deed) of the dialogue, and the special relationship between them, all require meticulous attention in order to comprehend the teachings of the dialogue as a whole[2]. Implicit in this is the assumption that Plato reflexively applied the rules for good writing which he himself set out in *Phaedrus* (264bc; which Strauss identifies as the source of Plato's 'law of logographic necessity'). Thus, not only the words of the *Laches* will be considered as important and necessary, but also the *order* of the words, treating the work as an organic unity, as if it were a living 'body'.

In interpreting the *Laches*, reference is occasionally made to other Platonic dialogues, especially *Republic* and *Apology of Socrates*, but also *Theages*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Theaetetus*, and *Symposium*. It is also useful to consider certain portions of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*[3], as well as Plutarch's 'Life of Nicias' in his collection of *Noble Lives*[4], Aristophanes' *Clouds*[5], and Aristotle's *Nicomachean*

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[2]Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, p. 50-62.

[3]Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Translated by Rex Warner, Great Britain: Penguin Classics. Henceforth cited as, "*Thucydides*".

[4]*Plutarch's Lives*, Translated by John Dryden and Revised by Arthur Hugh Clough, USA: The Modern Library. Henceforth cited as, "*Plutarch's Lives*".

[5]Plato and Aristophanes, *Four texts on Socrates; Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and*

Ethics[6]. Concerning more modern sources, frequent reference is made to Walter T. Schmid's outstanding book *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's "Laches"*[7]. Since so often his analysis is persuasive, as well as lucid and succinct, it is sometimes convenient simply to quote him. However, noted accordingly are important respects where this interpretation diverges from his. Another especially useful work is James H. Nichols' interpretive essay on the *Laches* in *The Roots of Political Philosophy; Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*[8], which accompanies his generally excellent translation, upon which this treatment generally relies. Rosamond Kent Sprague's translation of the *Laches*[9], while less accurate, is sometimes helpful for understanding the 'spirit' of the dialogue, and thus occasionally the alternative rendering of the Greek text there provided is cited. Lastly, Stuart James Munro's commentary on Plato's *Laches* is sometimes cited[10].

Crito and Aristophanes' Clouds, Translated with notes by Thomas G. West and Grase Starry West, USA: Cornell University Press. Henceforth cited as "*Clouds*".

[6]Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, England: Penguin Classics. Henceforth cited as, "Aristotle, *NE*".

[7]Schmid, Walter T., *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's Laches*, USA: Southern Illinois University Press. Henceforth cited as, "Schmid".

[8]*The Roots of Political Philosophy; Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogue*, Edited by Thomas L. Pangle. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1987. Henceforth cited as, "Nichols".

[9]*Laches and Charmides*, Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by Rosamond Kent Sprague. Indianapolis, USA: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing 1982. Henceforth cited as, "Sprague".

[10]Stuart James Munro, "*A Commentary On Plato's Laches*", (MA Thesis., University of Alberta, 1984). Henceforth cited as "Munro".

NOTE ON THE DIVISION OF THE TEXT:

In keeping with the belief that the Platonic dialogue represents an organic unity, the text of the *Laches* is divided into seven sections. Taking a cue from Plato's use of the words "from the beginning" (or, "from the foundation"; "*ex Arches*"), each new section begins as indicated by the usage of the phrase. However, it is not always immediately obvious that a new section has been indicated, and one only learns of the division in retrospect. For example, one only learns that 181a-b is a new "beginning" by Laches' words at 184c. Likewise, one only learns that 182e is a new "beginning" by Laches' words at 184b, and the same with 190d with respect to Socrates' words at 198a[11].

IV: DRAMATIC SETTING OF THE DIALOGUE

DATE:

A variety of evidence suggests that The *Laches* is set at approximately 423 BC, two years prior to the negotiated peace between Athens and Sparta (the so-called "Peace of Nicias"). As Laches nicely indicates, Nicias is at this time the leader of the Athenian democracy

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[11] It would seem that Lysimachus' using "*ex Arches*" at 187c-d ought to make 179a-b a new beginning. However, a careful reading of Lysimachus' words at 187c-d indicates that the "beginning" of which he speaks goes back to the very beginning of the dialogue (i.e., his prefatory speech).

(197d). An account of the dialogue's historical background is provided by Schmid, who states:

> "This dating for the action of the dialogue derives from Laches' remarks at 181b, which suggest that the dialogue is occurring after the battle at Delium in 424 B.C. If the dialogue were later than 423, it would be natural for Laches also to mention the more serious Athenian defeat at Amphipolis in 422, in which campaign Socrates also served, but Laches does not; and it would be amazing even for Lysimachus not to have heard of Socrates, whose name Aristophanes that year made a household word in Athens. Furthermore, if the dialogue were taking place after Amphipolis when Nicias and his allies were looking forward to peace with Sparta, Nicias would not speak of the "contest which lies before us" (182a). Now Nicias was head of the government in 423, after the defeat at Delium, before the defeat at Amphipolis, and in that year he arranged a short-lived truce. It is to the period just prior to his arranging that truce, before the production of the *Clouds*, that all the evidence for the dating of the *Laches* points" (p. 183).

Though it often proves impossible to establish the dramatic date of a Platonic dialogue with complete certainty, it is always worth the attempt. Schmid's account, though not without some problems, is defensible provided one is not dogmatic concerning it. As he notes in the first place, one can be certain that the dialogue is after the battle at Delium (424) since Laches himself refers to it, and be fairly sure that it is before the Peace of Nicias (421). Thus one can say with confidence that the dialogue's dramatic date is *sometime* between 424-421. It could be argued that the dialogue is taking place between 422-421, since Cleon died in the Athenian defeat at Amphipolis in 422[12], and it might seem problematic for Laches to speak of Nicias as *the* leader of the Athenian government were Cleon still alive. However, the Athenian defeat at

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[12]Lempriere, John, *Classical Dictionary*, p. 173.

Amphipolis was, along with the defeat at Delium, the most devastating Athenian defeat of the period in question. Since Socrates did serve in both campaigns, and since Laches does bring up the defeat at Delium in order to make the point that things would have turned out differently had everybody behaved like Socrates, it would seem odd (as Schmid argues) that Laches would not mention Amphipolis had it already taken place. Moreover, the "law of logographic necessity" needs to be applied to the fact that Plato makes an explicit point of having Lysimachus say that he is unaware of Socrates' activities (181a). For it is one thing not to get out of the house much (as Plato has Lysimachus say of himself at 180d), but it is another thing never even to have heard of a man who was sufficiently notorious to be caricatured in a play by the leading comic poet of the day, and which was "performed . . . at a major festival"[13]. While the absence of any reference to Amphipolis, as well as the point concerning the *Clouds* being performed in 423, are each somewhat problematic, nonetheless they do fit together with Schmid's other points, making for a fairly strong argument. That said, one should emphasize that this is no more than a reasonable surmise.

Still, the dialogue's dramatic date could be of some importance for an adequate understanding of it. Of special interest is the possibility that the conversation is taking place either soon before or soon after Aristophanes' *Clouds*. The *Clouds* was arguably the single greatest contributor to the bad reputation of Socrates and philosophy. In the *Apology*, Socrates goes to some considerable lengths to defend himself

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[13]West and West, *Four Texts on Socrates*, n.109. See also n. 96, where it is said that the clouds was first shown in circa 423.

from this first and (he contends) more dangerous accuser of him, namely, this comic poet (*Apology*, 17b). Thus, bearing in mind that there might very well be an important relationship between the *Laches* and the *Clouds*, and that there is a definite relationship between the *Clouds* and the *Apology*, one wants to be alert for indication of a special relationship between the *Laches* and the *Apology*. Though one could rightly argue that the *Apology* (and, hence, also the *Clouds*) bears on most if not all of the Socratic dialogues, one should nonetheless attempt to be specific in each case. Admittedly, the central task is that of examining the *Laches* as a coherent whole unto itself. Nonetheless, a full appreciation of the *Laches'* coherence may be dependent on one's recognizing some basic facts, an awareness of which Plato presumed, but which are not explicitly mentioned in the dialogue. The most obvious of these, of course, is Socrates' having been put to death by the Athenians, allegedly for irreligiosity and corrupting the youth, though he himself attributes his condemnation to envy and slander (*Apology*, 28a).

DRAMATIC LOCATION:

The action and dialogue of the *Laches* takes place in 'the city', indicated by Lysimachus' reference to "this city" (179c). This might *seem* like the most trivial of observations, but it is not. Unlike in other Socratic dialogues where one is specifically told that the conversation is taking place in a gymnasium, (e.g. *Lysis*, *Charmides*, or *Euthydemus*), or under a portico, (e.g. *Theages*), or at some particular person's house (e.g. *Protagoras*, *Republic*, *Symposium*), or outside of the city (*Phaedrus*), here one knows for certain only that it is in 'the city'. Schmid supposes that "the conversation in the Laches occurs at a palaestra or wrestling

school"[14]. However, while this seems the most reasonable surmise, it is worth noting that there is no explicit indication of this in the dialogue. Thus, one cannot speak with complete confidence on this point. Nonetheless, one might provisionally suppose that the conversation is taking place either at, or perhaps just outside, the *paleastra*[15].

V: ***DRAMATIS PERSONAE***

Of the characters of the dialogue, nothing resembling a biography is here offered, but simply a few short remarks which may facilitate the interpretation. Lysimachus is the son of the illustrious Athenian statesman Aristeides, who famously earned the public title of "the just". Unlike his father, however, Lysimachus is unaccomplished in public deeds; nor is one given any indication that he is especially accomplished intellectually. Though Lysimachus blames his father's neglect for his own lack of accomplishment and comparative obscurity, Socrates says in the *Meno* that Lysimachus' father did give him a first-rate education as judged by the standards of the day (94a). Moreover, Socrates is there speaking in the context of virtuous men's apparent inability to teach their own exceptional political virtue to their sons (citing the case of Lysimachus, among others, as evidence that such political virtue must not be teachable). Furthermore, he asks Anytus in this regard, "does it seem to

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[14]Schmid, n. 38.

[15]Perhaps in the same way in which spectators walk out of, for example, a hockey game or a concert or even a university lecture, conversing about what they have just seen.

you that he [Lysimachus] has turned out a better man than anyone else? You have been in his company, [I] presume, and you see what he is like" (94a). Lysimachus is also mentioned in Plutarch, where one learns that on account of Aristeides' dying in poverty, "[U]pon... Lysimachus, the people bestowed a hundred minas of money, and so many acres of land, and ordered him besides, upon the motion of Alcibiades, four drachmas a day"[16]. His companion, Melesias, is the son of Thucydides[17], who, though not as famous as Aristeides, was also held in great esteem by the Athenian people. He led the aristocratic party that opposed Pericles, but his son Melesias achieved no comparable public distinction, and so his case is treated by Socrates as similar to that of Lysimachus with respect to the assessment given his virtue in the *Meno* (94b-d).

Laches is known to readers of Plato's *Symposium* as the man who bravely fought side by side with Socrates in the retreat from Delium, although Alcibiades (who tells of it in that dialogue) praises Socrates more highly. He later became a general in the Athenian army, and led an expedition to Sicily in which he was to survey the conditions there[18]. Ironically, as one learns from Thucydides the historian, the Athenians had very poor information when they eventually attacked Sicily[19] (i.e., the infamous Sicilian Expedition in which Nicias perished). Laches died at the battle of Mantinea in 418, fighting as a general with his soldiers. This was an important defeat in the Peloponnesian war, and one which could likely have been avoided if it were not for the Argive Coalition's over-

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16 *Plutarch's Lives*, p. 410-11.
17 Not the historian.
18 Thucydides, p. 245-246.
19 Ibid., p. 409.

zealous attack[20]. Laches also makes an appearance in Aristophanes' *Wasps* as a man accused of malfeasance by a sophistic lawyer. He is there acquitted of the charges, and treated as an accomplished soldier who has fought devotedly for Athens. One also learns there that he lacked a 'musical' education (i.e., in what today is roughly called 'the Liberal Arts')[21].

Nicias is the most famous of the participants portrayed in the dialogue (apart from Socrates). He was a leader of the Athenian government, and he reluctantly accepted co-leadership of the ill-fated Sicilian Expedition, along with Lamachus and Alcibiades. When Alcibiades was called home on charges of impiety and Lamachus was killed, Nicias was left in sole charge. The expedition ended in disaster, in no small part because of Nicias' decision after an eclipse of the sun to follow the diviners' advice and stay twenty-seven more days before retreating. For the resulting debacle Nicias earned historical disgrace, despite his receiving high praise in other respects from both Thucydides and Plutarch.

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[20]Ibid., p. 388-400. See also Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, USA: Cornell University Press, p.114; henceforth cited as, "Kagan".

[21]Schmid, p. 11-12. Schmid nicely summarizes Laches portrayal in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (942-59; where he is being charged with malfeasance), saying that in *Wasps*, it is said of Laches that he, ". . . is a good old dog, that he has fought the wolves and suffered hardship for the defense of Athens, that he should not be condemned for his inability to speak, and that he should, even if guilty, be forgiven on grounds of his lack of music education" (p.12).

"Don't you know that the beginning is the most important part of every work and that this is especially so with anything young and tender? For at that stage it's most plastic, and each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give to it."

[Plato's *Republic*, 377a-b]

"Idleness is the beginning of all psychology. What? could psychology be -- a vice?"

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Twighlight of the Idols***, *Maxims and Arrows* (1)]

COMMENTARY

(1)

"You have seen the man fighting in armor, Nicias and Laches". So begins Plato's *Laches*. Perhaps by examining the *Laches* the reader will also see some 'terribly clever' fighter. But to achieve this certain qualities of soul will be needed. Most notably, it may take some courage to examine fully Plato's inquiry into courage. Ultimately, it is the reader who must steadfastly fight his way through Plato's armor if he is to even glimpse his thought.

How then, ought one to proceed? Given the nature and enormity of the task, perhaps boldly and daringly would be best. But to qualify this somewhat, one ought to be *prudently* daring. And what better way to do this than to make a full frontal assault on the dialogue's 'head'.

> **You have seen the man fighting in armor, Nicias and Laches. Melesias here and I did not tell you at that time why we bade you see it together with us, but now we shall: for to you we think we should speak frankly. Now there are some who ridicule such things, and if one should consult with them, they would not say what they think; rather, they second-guess the one who is consulting and say other things against their own opinion. But you, we thought, were both capable of knowing and, when you knew, would state your opinions simply, and so we took you into our counsel on the matters which we are about to communicate. Well then, the following is what I have been saying so much about by way of preface.**

The preceding, then, is what one must say "much about" by way of preface. One might begin by asking, why do some people ridicule

speaking frankly? Perhaps the first thing to notice is that people do not ridicule frank speech when it is in their interest, thought they incline towards 'un-frank' speech when it is not. For example, one would not expect someone like Stesilaus to speak with total 'frankness' with regards to fighting in armor, given that he is 'selling' this skill. Less than perfect frankness is especially likely when some point of pride or honor is on the line. That a person's 'frankness' or lack thereof is related to their interests must serve, then, as something of a 'first principle'.

Thus, it is not difficult to see one reason why one might ridicule Lysimachus and Melesias for their "frankness," since they are admitting that they do not fully trust their own abilities to form a judgment on the topic of their children's education, and this is or at least ought to be a slight to their honor and reputations. But one ought to notice a subtle irony in the fact that others would "ridicule" Lysimachus and Melesias for being frank about this inasmuch as the one ridiculing would likely know little or no better than the two old men as to the best education for the youths. For as the *Laches* shows, pedagogy is a complex matter requiring profound insight into the human condition. Perhaps the key to understanding such people as would ridicule is to be found in the words of Homer quoted late in the dialogue. For although Homer states that "it is not good for shame to be present in a needy man" (201b), most people *do* tend to feel some shame over being 'needy'. Thus, most people will not be "frank" in admitting their need for counsel for fear of the very ridicule which they would themselves dispense.

Concerning the theme of counsel which Lysimachus' prefatory speech invites one to contemplate, notice further its curious relationship to honor inasmuch as the very request for counsel contains in it a recognition

of the counselor's worthiness. That is, to ask one for counsel is often an implicit recognition of the counselor's greater intelligence, experience, expertise, or some such[22]. Moreover, the one seeking counsel can even gain honor in the counselor's eyes inasmuch as he had the intelligence to recognize such superiority. Thus, and more to the point, seeking counsel can be used as *flattery* by either the counselor or the one seeking counsel (or both).

Lysimachus displays some of his understanding of human nature in his observing that most counselors ridicule the idea of being frank with the person seeking counsel. Why so? Does this not typically stem from a wish to avoid the unpleasantries which frank speech may arouse? For frank advice can often be painful for those to whom it is given. Moreover, certain topics exacerbate the problem, and not least to be considered in this respect is the topic of education. Telling someone, for example, that they should not even attempt to get into Medical School because they are not intelligent enough to ever get in (perhaps adding that they should look into 'auto-mechanics' instead) is something most people would rather not do. The *truth* is often something people do not want to hear, and it may take some courage to speak it nonetheless.

There is another aspect of the problem of 'frank speech' which ought not to go unnoted. People often do "not say what they think" when asked for counsel because they themselves have not actually thought about the problem posed, perhaps not believing the matter to be important, but in

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[22]"Often" because people sometimes seek counsel from others out of curiosity or for a 'second-opinion', without any belief in the person's superiority in the matter at hand. But because requests for advice usually implies some respect, it can be a form of flattery.

any case not wishing to acknowledge their ignorance[23]. Hence, such 'counselors' try to "second-guess" their consultors and tailor their replies accordingly. But then, why would counselor's who *have* thought about a problem give replies "against their own opinion"? Though the unpleasant consequences of 'frank speech' seems the most likely reason in most cases, might it not occasionally be because people lack the courage to put their own opinions on the line -- to let their own opinions be vulnerable to scrutiny? Someone who was not sure of his own opinion, or of his ability to defend it, would be more prone to all this "second guessing" and tailoring. Also, when one confirms another's opinion, one allows other options to go unquestioned, thus taking a kind of "easy road out" of the problem. That is to say, sheer laziness may contribute to one's providing 'unfrank' advice[24].

The first lines of the dialogue inform the reader that Lysimachus and Melesias have bid Nicias and Laches to come and see Stesilaus' spectacle, but without telling them precisely why they want them to do so. It is pertinent, then, to ask why the fathers would do this. They have already heard Stesilaus "praised" (179e), but presumably they wanted this assessment verified through a first-hand viewing by the two generals. For practical experience teaches the importance of 'first impressions'. So often judgment about a person or thing is affected by what has previously been heard or seen of the person or thing. Lysimachus later says that the person who told them of Stesilaus "praised" him (179e), and so if

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[23]Like Meletus in the Apology concerning the education of the young (*Apology*, 24c; 26ab).

[24]Of course, there might be more noble reasons why one would choose to be 'unfrank'. For example, pedagogic concerns, (to state only one possible example).

Lysimachus and Melesias would have done the same thing with Nicias and Laches, their judgment could very likely have become biased. In short, reputation precedes judgement[25].

Continuing with the first lines of the dialogue, Lysimachus tells Nicias and Laches, "But you, we thought, were both capable of knowing and, when you knew, would state your opinions simply, and so we took you into our counsel on the matters which we are about to communicate." The first obvious question is: why do they believe this about Nicias and Laches in particular? As soon becomes clear, the fact that Nicias and Laches each enjoy public esteem and an excellent reputation is a matter of great importance to Lysimachus and Melesias. Furthermore, these are men of nobility, honor, and most importantly, of action (or deeds). Such courageous and honorable men, Lysimachus and Melesias believe, have no reason not to be frank in *their* opinions. In addition, the high reputation the two generals enjoy apparently leads Lysimachus and Melesias to believe that they must be wise not simply in martial matters, but in other things as well. For they believe that the two generals are "both capable of knowing," the answer to their subsequent question: "What should they [the youths] learn or practice so as to become as good as possible?" (179d-e).

With these preliminary points about giving and receiving frank counsel having been made, Lysimachus "communicates" to Nicias and Laches why he and Melesias bade them to see the fighter in armor. The

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[25]Nicias later provides a nice example of this at 200b when he accuses Laches of ridiculing Damon without having ever "seen him." Laches himself has previously seen Stesilaus, and this likely affected his viewing of Stesilaus' display. Another example of this is provided in the *Meno*, where Anytus speaks ill of the sophists without having ever spoken to one.

word "to communicate" (*anakoinousthai*) is related to the word "common" (*koinos*). The words for "partner" and "partnership" are also derivatives of *koinos*[26]. This is important to note because the theme of things being in "common" is emphasized throughout the dialogue. Indeed, this theme of 'partnership' and 'the common' may have some special bearing on the topic of either courage or pedagogy, or both.

Examining Lysimachus' "preface" in light of Socrates' statement in *Republic* that "the beginning is the most important part of every work" (377a-b), one might wonder whether it somehow pertains to the dialogue's ostensible theme of courage. Though two respects in which one might see the theme of courage have been alluded to, there is more compelling evidence still. For Lysimachus here says that he and Melesias believe the two generals to be "*capable of knowing*". Later in the dialogue Socrates tells Laches that they ought to see if they "are in a *capable condition for knowing*" (190c-d)[27] one of the parts of virtue, at which point they determine to examine courage. Later still, when Laches reaches his *aporia*, Socrates suggests that they might be lacking 'courage in speech' and suggests to Laches that they be courageous in their search for knowledge (193e-194b).

Thus, captured in the beginning of the dialogue's first speech (what Lysimachus calls his "preface"), are the multiple topics of ***reputation*** (linked of course with praise, blame, honor, shame, flattery, slander and envy), ***knowledge*** (implied by the very theme of counsel), ***frank*** vs. ***'un-***

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[26]Nichols, 241.

[27]Though the Greek words are not identical in both cases, the point is still valid inasmuch as the meaning is sufficiently similar.

frank' speech, and, hidden between the lines, as it were, ***courage*** -- topics that are threaded throughout the balance of the dialogue.

After his prefatory remarks, Lysimachus proceeds with his long speech, saying:

> These are our sons. This one is his and has his grandfather's name, Thucydides. And this one also has a name from his grandfather, my father; for we call him Aristeides. Now, it seemed to us that we ought to take care of them as much as possible and not to do what the many do -- let them loose, when they have become lads, to do what they want -- but rather already now begin to take care of them to the extent that we are able. So then, knowing that you too have sons, we thought that you, if anyone, must have been concerned with how they should be cared for so as to become best, but that, if you have not often turned your mind to such a thing, we would remind you that one must not neglect it and would summon you in common to devote some care to our sons.

One sees that Lysimachus speaks in a manner that regularly recalls the theme of 'the common' (for example, common ancestry, their having sons in common, and the care they are to take for their children in common). Having introduced his and Melesias' sons, and pointed out that each bears the names of their famous grandfathers, one learns that the two old men want their young sons to "become best". In fact, they intend to set themselves apart from "the many" in this very matter of the education of their sons. Speaking for them both, Lysimachus says that they suppose that Nicias and Laches "if anyone" must also be concerned with the education of *their* sons (179b) . But why them, "if anyone"? Bearing in mind that Nicias and Laches are men of public accomplishment, perhaps Lysimachus and Melesias have in mind what Socrates will later make explicit. That is, that one day "the whole house of the father will be governed in a manner corresponding to the sort of people the children

become" (185a). Thus, Nicias and Laches have a lot at stake in their children's keeping up the high standard which they have set.

Lysimachus continues his long opening speech, saying:

> You must hear, Nicias and Laches, whence these opinions came to us, even if it takes a little longer. Now, Melesias here and I take our meals together, and the lads eat with us. As I said when I began the speech, we will be frank with you. Now each of us, concerning his own father, has many noble deeds to tell the young men, which they accomplished both in war and in peace, managing the affairs both of the allies and of this city, but as for our own deeds, neither of us has any to tell. These things make us rather ashamed before them, and we blame our fathers for letting us live a soft life, when we became lads, while they were busy with the affairs of others. We point out these very things to these young men, telling them that, if they neglect themselves and do not obey us, they will be without fame, but if that take care, they might become worthy of the names that they bear.
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> Now then, they declare they will obey us. We in turn are looking into this: what should they learn or practice so as to become as good as possible? Now, someone proposed this study to us, saying that it would be noble for a youth to learn fighting in armor, and he praised this man whom you have now seen putting on a display, and he further bade us see him. It seemed necessary that we ourselves should go to the man's spectacle and take you along with us as fellow spectators and also as counselors and partners, if you wish, in the care of our sons.
>
> These are the things that we wanted to communicate to you. So now it is your part to give counsel both about this study -- whether it seems it must be learned or not -- and about the others if you have any study or practice to praise for a young man and to say what you will do about our partnership.

One should immediately notice that their habit of taking their meals together with their sons is a peculiarly Spartan practice[28]. Moreover, one

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[28]Schmid, p. 4. Also, there might be something in this Spartan practice of Lysimachus'

has little reason to suspect that Lysimachus is being anything other than 'frank' since he speaks in a way so denigrating to himself and Melesias. Admitting that the two of them are "rather ashamed" of themselves because they have no "noble deeds" of their own to speak of, they can only recount the deeds of their fathers. And bearing in mind that the two boys are listening to this, there might be an intention on Lysimachus' part to have them learn something. For the entire emphasis of Lysimachus' subsequent speech is on "deeds" (twice at 179c) and how they give one "fame" (179d). *Deeds*, and their consequences in 'the city' (i.e., honor/praise, shame/blame -- in a word: reputation), are apparently the most important things in the horizon of Lysimachus' and Melesias' thought[29]. Expectedly, the "noble deeds" which Lysimachus speaks of have a decidedly public character, mentioning how their fathers managed "the affairs both of the allies and of this city", "both in war and in peace."

Several things are interesting about Lysimachus' comment that their fathers are to blame for their condition because they let them "live a soft life" while they were "busy with the affairs of others" . Firstly, in the background of all of this is the character of the Athenian regime, wherein many of its youths are allowed to "live a soft life". This is in striking contrast to Sparta, where the regime itself takes responsibility for its citizens' education's -- an education which aims at anything but a "soft life". Secondly, Lysimachus' reference to his and Melesias' fathers'

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and Melesias' which links them to the very Spartan-like Laches. Moreover, as Munro notes (p.7), the implication of this practice might be that the men take their meals in public. Thus, their opinion as to their father's neglect of them would also be public knowledge.

[29]Though it is not yet clear whether they hold these things to be ends in themselves or merely indicators of true ends.

neglect of them would seem to imply that in this respect they were like "the many" who let their lads loose to do what they want. Lastly, and related, Socrates says in the *Meno* that Aristeides and Thucydides *did* give their children the best traditional (Athenian) education, making one doubt the truth of Lysimachus' claim about being neglected. But is Lysimachus intentionally being dishonest, or does he really believe what he is saying? Perhaps he and Melesias are guilty of that truly human (all too human) mistake which Nicias will later accuse Laches of, that is, of looking "not toward yourself but toward others" (200b).

Not only has Lysimachus made explicit their real opinion as to the guiding consideration of their children's education (i.e., fame), he has also raised an interesting point in his reference to how one ought to "live up to one's ancestry." What does Lysimachus' and Melesias' comparative obscurity say about the virtues of their fathers? Are not these two 'nobodies' something of a blemish on their fathers' records? Does not portrayal of these two characters both here and in the *Meno*, presumably reflecting the general Athenian opinion about them in their actual lives, have the effect of tarnishing their father's reputations? By contrast, the explicit concern of Lysimachus and Melesias that their children become famous is meant to reflect well on them. For this likely seems to them the last and only way to redeem themselves, and in so doing repair the damage which they have done to their own fathers' reputations. Thus, one can see that there is a lot at stake for these two old men. For when one sees an excellent person (or even just an amiable and law-abiding person) is it not a natural thing for one to suspect that they had "good parents" (and conversely with respect to bad people)? Seen in this light, parents have more than just a 'loving interest' in how their children turn

out. Whether one likes it or not, whether it is always fair or not, parents and their children are thought to reflect on one another to at least some extent, be it positively or negatively.

Lysimachus finally completes the things he "wanted to communicate", having invited Nicias and Laches to be "partners" in the care of "our sons" ("our" being understood here as all four of the men's sons). The general matter of which Nicias and Laches are to be counselors is this: "What should they learn or practice so as to become as good as possible", be it the study of fighting in armor, or any "others if you have any study or practice to praise for a young man"[30]. It is left to Nicias and Laches to say what they will do about the invited "partnership".

At this point, Nicias enters the discussion. Interestingly, his first word in the dialogue is "I" (*ego*)[31], perhaps revealing an important facet of his character, namely, his individualistic inclinations. Nicias praises the old men's intentions, adding that he will be a partner. He expresses confidence that Laches will do the same, and Laches confirms this, saying: "What you think is true, Nicias" (180b). In the Greek, Laches' first word of the dialogue is "true" (*aléthé*)[32]. Perhaps this also is somehow indicative of Laches' character. Moreover, Laches agrees with Lysimachus' observation as to the neglect of children, and private affairs generally, by publicly active men, even admitting that Nicias and he are also guilty of what was said "against" such men. Though he registers no protest here, one later learns that this is not strictly true of Nicias. Not

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[30] As it turns out, neither Nicias nor Laches ever mention any other study or practice.
[31] Cf. Schmid, p.61.
[32] Ibid.

only has Socrates recently introduced to him a music teacher for his son Niceratus (180d), but Nicias himself has often asked Socrates to educate Niceratus himself (200d). So Nicias is clearly not of a "heedless and neglectful disposition toward both children and other private affairs" (180b), but rather seems to be expressly concerned with such things.

Laches goes on to express amazement at the fact that Lysimachus and Melesias have chosen them as "counselors on the education of the young men but do not summon Socrates here" (who apparently is then nearby; 180c). Laches gives two reasons why the old men should have chosen Socrates as counselor: 1) he is of their deme; and 2) "He is always spending his time wherever there is any noble study or practice of the sort you are seeking for the youths" (180c). Several things are worth noting in Laches' reasoning. Firstly, he stresses the 'commonality' between Socrates and the old men in their being from the same deme. There is a hint of 'traditionalism' in this kind of thinking inasmuch at it presumes a discriminatory hierarchy based on sociopolitical ties. There is a hint of 'love of one's own' in this as well, inasmuch as Socrates might be more sincerely interested in the youths precisely *because* they are of his own deme. Moreover, Laches' second criterion for choosing Socrates shows how he is a man who trusts what he *sees*. For he has never conversed with Socrates about such matters (188e), but has simply seen Socrates at such places where the youth pursue noble practices. After Lysimachus expresses his apparent surprise and asks whether Socrates has "devoted care to such things" as the education of the young, Laches confidently answers "Most certainly, Lysimachus" (180c). Thus, Socrates' reputation amongst these four men at least is *not* one of corrupting the youth.

Nicias confirms Laches' comment concerning Socrates' concern for educational matters. Socrates has introduced him to Damon, the student of Agathocles, the "most refined of men in music" and "other matters" as a "music teacher" for his son Niceratus[33](180d). At this point, Lysimachus tells the men that because of his old age he no longer knows the "younger men" of the city, thus explaining his ignorance about Socrates, whom he calls "child of Sophroniscus" (180d). He tells Socrates that, if he can, he "must" give counsel to his "fellow demesman". Moreover, he says this would "be just", because Socrates is also a "paternal friend" of him and his child[34], adding that he and Sophroniscus were life-long "comrades and friends" who never quarreled (180e)[35]. But what is perhaps most interesting to note here is that the obscure and unaccomplished Sophroniscus was father to the most famous man in the entire history of philosophy. Thus, not only can accomplished men have unaccomplished sons (as did the fathers of Lysimachus and Melesias, and even Socrates himself), but unaccomplished men can have accomplished sons. Moreover, the example of Socrates, the "child of Sophroniscus", is

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[33]And one should notice that whereas Laches spoke of Socrates' acquaintance with matters of gymnastics, Nicias will speak of Socrates in the context of music. Moreover, Damon's association with Niceratus must have been fruitful, since Niceratus grows up to become a rhapsode (Schmid, p. 60). Thus Niceratus, it seems, did not at all live up to *his* father's fame. Furthermore, one might wonder whether it is reflective of Nicias' soul that he stresses music over gymnastic. The dangers of this are spoken of in the *Republic*, a dialogue in which, ironically, Nicias' son Niceratus is a *silent* participant.

[34]Lysimachus thus implies an understanding of justice as 'doing good to one's friends', and perhaps there is even a hint of 'giving back what one owes'. That is, since the older men of the deme were a part of Socrates' rearing, he owes it to the deme to return the favor now that he is older.

[35]One has to question whether Lysimachus is here being 'frank' inasmuch as it is likely a reflection of being life-long "comrades and friends" that such people *do* quarrel. That is, one generally never 'quarrels' with mere acquaintances, but this is not so with dear friends.

problematic for those who would 'shift the blame' for their own lack of distinction on to their fathers.

After recalling that the young boys mention a certain Socrates and "praise him vehemently" (180e), he asks the boys if this "son of Sophroniscus" is the Socrates whom they have been speaking about. The boys reply, in their one and only speech of the dialogue, "Most certainly, father, this is he" (181a). One sees from this that there is a sense in which the boys' Socratic education has already begun. At this point Lysimachus becomes noticeably more excited. With the first of the seven oaths in the dialogue he exclaims, "By Hera, Socrates, how well you have exalted your father, the best of men! And would that your things might belong to us and ours to you!" (181a). There seems to be a further hint of flattery -- or at least unintended irony -- in Lysimachus' calling the obscure and unaccomplished Sophroniscus "the best of men". Whatever the case, Lysimachus' swearing by the goddess of marriage, birth and the family subtly strengthens his claim that it would be "just" for Socrates to give counsel to 'paternal friends'.

"One seeks a midwife for his thoughts, another someone to whom he can be a midwife: thus originates a good conversation."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Beyond Good and Evil***, *Maxims and Interludes* (136)]

"Remember, too, that freedom, if we preserve our freedom by our own efforts, will easily restore us to our old position; . . . You must not fall below the standard of your fathers, who . . . won an empire by their own toil and sweat . . . Not courage alone, therefore, but an actual sense of your superiority should animate you as you go forward against the enemy. Confidence, out of a mixture of ignorance and good luck, can be felt even by cowards; but this sense of superiority comes only to those who, like us, have real reasons for knowing that they are better placed than their opponents. And when the chances on both sides are equal, it is intelligence that confirms courage -- the intelligence that makes one able to look down on one's opponent, and which proceeds not by hoping for the best (a method only valuable in desperate situations), but by estimating what the facts are, and thus obtaining a clearer vision of what to expect."

[Pericles' speech to the Athenians in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Book 2, 62)].

(2)

Laches fans the flames of Lysimachus' exuberance, imploring him not to "let the man go" (181a), adding that he "saw" Socrates exalting "not only his father but also the fatherland" in the flight from Delium (181b). Laches says that if others had been like Socrates[36], and by implication himself, the city would have fared very differently. Here Laches tacitly reminds one that an individual's courage is valuable to his *city* and can contribute to the common good. Hence, the city itself has a stake in cultivating the courage of its citizens -- part of the larger theme of 'the common' in the *Laches*. Of further interest is how the word "fatherland" makes the relationship between a person and his city parallel that which exists in the family[37].

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[36]It is very likely that Laches is here referring to the courage which he believes these two displayed and of which Socrates reminds him of at 193e.

[37]One would do well in this respect to recall Socrates argument on behalf of the city in the *Crito*. For there he speaks of the "fatherland" as having "begat, nourished, and educated" its citizens (51c-d). Also, Socrates there speaks of the "fatherland" in a way which may be especially pertinent to the present inquiry, asking on its behalf (51a-c):

> Or are you so wise that you have been unaware that fatherland is something more honorable than mother and father and all the other forebears, and more venerable, and more holy, and more highly esteemed among gods and among human beings who are intelligent? And that you must revere and give way to and fawn upon a fatherland more than a father when it is angry with you, and either persuade it or do whatever it bids, and keep quiet and suffer if it orders you to suffer anything, whether to be beaten or to be bound? Or that if it leads you into war to be wounded or killed, this must be done? And that this is just and that you are not to give way or retreat or leave your station, but that in war and in court and everywhere, you must do whatever the city

Lysimachus is impressed with the "fine praise" of Socrates, not just because those who are praising him are themselves 'trustworthy', but more specifically because they are trustworthy in the very things for which they praise him (i.e., Laches with respect to Socrates' valor in war, and Nicias with respect to Socrates' ability to counsel on educational matters). He tells Socrates that "upon hearing *these things*, I rejoice that you enjoy a good reputation" (181b). One is left to wonder if there are other things for which Socrates could enjoy a good reputation that would not make Lysimachus "rejoice". He further tells Socrates to include him among those who are "best disposed" towards him, even implicitly chiding the younger Socrates for not having already in the past frequented him and his family and regarded them as his "own", because this would have been "just" (181c).

Utilizing his age and relationship to Socrates' father, Lysimachus bids Socrates to do these things so that he may preserve their "friendship" (181c). He warns Socrates that he will "remind" him of these things "again hereafter", and despite his later claim of having a defective memory (189c), he does not forget to do this (see 201c).

Lysimachus next asks Socrates' advice on the subject they began with: should the lads learn to fight in armor? This implies both that Socrates also saw Stesilaus' spectacle, and that his doing so is essential to judging its suitability for the goal at hand, (i.e., to make the youths

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and fatherland bid, or else persuade it what the just is by nature? And that it is not pious to do violence to mother or father, and still less by far to the fatherland than to them?"

become the best possible). And so Socrates speaks for the first time in the dialogue.

Professing a willingness to provide any counsel he can, Socrates suggests that it would be "most just" for Nicias and Laches, being older, to speak first. Then, having heard them, if he has something else to say he will voice his own opinion on the matter, teaching and persuading the others if he is able. Looking ahead, one should notice that Socrates never gives his own opinion as he said he would, but rather re-orients the entire investigation, transforming it into an examination of their opinions on an entirely different topic. But perhaps Socrates does this precisely so that he may "teach and persuade" them?

Responding to Socrates' suggestion that the elder and more experienced men should speak first, Nicias offers his appraisal of fighting in armor, saying that he believes it should be learned for many reasons. He begins and ends his eloquent presentation with the phrase "in my opinion"[38], perhaps reflecting his 'open mindedness' with respect to knowledge. In any case, Nicias states seven reasons why this study is beneficial.

Each of Nicias' seven reasons bear on the more important issues of the dialogue, and thus are worthy of further consideration. Noting in his first point how it is good for those youths who have "leisure", Nicias says that "it is good that they not pass time elsewhere, in places where the young love to spend their time". Despite lacking perfect information

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[38] A phrase he uses seven times in the dialogue.

concerning Athenian life, one may still guess what Nicias is saying by looking at the activities which the youths of today often do when they have leisure: drugs and alcohol, vandalism, recklessness, and other such. In short, they are more apt to get into 'trouble'. Assuming human nature (and especially of youths) is not all that different today than it was in ancient Athens, one suspects Nicias is speaking of the essential desire amongst male youths to prove their ***manliness*** to one another (and to themselves) through such things as risk, independence, competitiveness, aggression, and so on.

Of further interest about the youths described is how often those most disruptive of civic harmony are also the most spirited, and hence, potentially the best soldiers. Representing not just a present problem, but also a future good, polities have a double interest in channeling youthful spirit. Thus the habits, dispositions, general nurture and education they receive are of great importance, and greatest when a polity is either at war or imminently threatened by it. Nicias believes that fighting in armor would be a beneficial part of this upbringing, and his subsequent reasons for promoting it all point to this.

Nicias' mentioning of how it will make the youths in "better bodily condition" (181e), supposedly on a par with "any of the gymnastic exercises" (182a), is an extension of his point concerning leisure just discussed. One can assume that Nicias has in mind an education much like that prescribed by 'Just Speech' in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, whose "education nurtured the men who fought at Marathon", by having his students pass their "time in the gymnasium, sleek and flourishing, not mouthing prickly perversities in the marketplace as they do nowadays" (*Clouds*, 985-1000). Moreover, one need not assume that because Nicias

has not expressly mentioned the soul that he is necessarily unmindful of its role in the "toil" of fighting in armor. For it is the soul which commands the body to struggle steadfastly through such "toil". Nonetheless, one should at least note that he has not explicitly mentioned the effects of fighting in armor on the soul.

Nicias' second point is that fighting in armor, as well as horsemanship, most befits a free man because they are so needed for war. Presumably, he has in mind Athens present war against Sparta. This second point completes the thought and verifies the intentions of the first point. Holding fighting in armor to be on par with "horsemanship" as the two most important "implements relating to war", he says that, "*this* gymnastic exercise, as well as horsemanship, *most* befits a free man" (182a). So, Nicias likely believes that all of the heavy-armed foot soldiers should learn fighting in armor, thus endorsing something of a departure from the traditional Greek method of the *phalanx*[39]. Nicias completes the point by speaking of "competitors" as well as "those things for which the contest lies before us" (182a). Though not making his precise meaning explicit, Nicias probably means such things as victory, honor, glory, and survival.

Nicias' third point speaks of the benefits of fighting in armor in actual battle, when one must "fight in the ranks with many others" (182a). Thus, according to Nicias, having a fighter in armor side by side with the rest of the hoplites, (most of whom will not be specially skilled in fighting in armor), will still be beneficial in battle.

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[39]If one knew more about precisely what 'fighting in armor' actually entailed, one could better judge the extent of this departure.

Nicias' fourth and central point deserves particular attention because he contends that this is the "greatest benefit" of fighting in armor, namely, "when the ranks are broken and one must, one on one, either pursue to attack someone who is defending himself or defend oneself even in flight from another who is attacking" (182a-b). That Nicias holds this to be the "greatest benefit" might say much about why Nicias is so fond of fighting in armor: it is especially valuable in individual combat. Recalling that Nicias' first word in the dialogue was "I" and that (unlike Laches) Nicias does not neglect things private, might it be the *individualism* inherent in fighting in armor which makes Nicias most fond of it? At any rate, Nicias holds fighting in armor to be so beneficial that the man who knows it will "gain the advantage everywhere" (182b). One further thing to notice is Nicias' reference to *defending oneself in flight*, reminding one of Socrates' and Laches' retreat from Delium (see 181b).

Concerning Nicias' fifth point, he says that the study "summons" one to a "desire" for other "noble study", implying that it will produce higher ambition in the soul of its practitioner. Nicias states that the study which necessarily comes next is "orders of battle" or "ranks"[40]. Moreover, it is a desire which "*everyone* who has learned fighting in armor would desire" (182b). But might Nicias be saying this to please Lysimachus? Indeed, this raises the possibility that Nicias has been doing throughout what Lysimachus claimed he was trying to avoid: being second-guessed and told what he wants to hear. In any case, Nicias says that after having sought "honor" in these things, the man will "eagerly

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[40]The Greek word is *taxis*, of which Nichols says, "One could call this study 'tactics'" (Nichols, n.10).

press on" to "*stratégia*", or "generalship", the architectonic art par excellence in the domain of war (182c). Its ultimate aim is victory and only derivatively honor. Though these normally go together as a kind of 'natural pair', one cannot help but wonder whether Nicias fully appreciates their distinction.

Nicias' sixth point is that the "knowledge" of fighting in armor would make a man "not a little more confident and more courageous" than himself in war (182c). This is the first mention of courage[41] in the dialogue and Nicias immediately links it to "knowledge". Moreover, he links "knowledge" to "confidence". But yet, Nicias' words call again for suspicion. For he does not say that it *might* make one more courageous but that it "would", with the same holding for confidence (i.e., the knowledge *would* make one more confident). Thus, Nicias seems to believe that the relationship between knowledge and confidence, as well as knowledge and courage, is one of *necessity*. In fact, the actual relationship between knowledge, confidence and courage turns out to be at the crux of Nicias' later discussion with Socrates.

Nicias' seventh and last point makes reference to the contribution which fighting in armor will make to one's "appearance". Conceding that some might find it "dishonorable" to speak of such a thing, Nicias admits that he does not (182c). He says that on account of the fighter in armor's

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[41]Indeed, this is the first of 77 mentions of "courage" and its cognates in the dialogue. Seventy-seven being a multiple of seven, one might also note that the dialogue contains seven oaths; that Nicias and Laches each give seven reasons for and against fighting in armor; that Nicias uses the phrase "in my opinion" seven times; that Socrates provides Laches with seven examples in his catalogue of situations wherein one may manifest courage (191d); and that the dialogue itself divides into seven sections.

"gracefulness," he will "appear more terrible to the enemies" (182d)[42]. Thus Nicias concludes his encomium for fighting in armor, adding (perhaps deprecatorally) that if Laches has something besides these things to say, he "would hear him with pleasure" (182d).

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[42]One might recall here Alcibiades' comments in the *Symposium*. There he says that in the retreat from Delium, Socrates was "tramping along there just as he does" around peaceful Athens, and that on account of this the enemy was frightened and barely touched either him or Laches (see *Symposium* 221a-b).

"Then there is a great difference between us and our opponents, in our attitude towards military security. Here are some examples: . . . we rely, not on secret weapons, but on our own real courage and loyalty. There is a difference, too, in our educational systems. The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage; we pass our lives without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are. . . . There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with a laborious training, with natural rather than with state-induced courage. . . . This is one point in which, I think, our city deserves to be admired. There are also others: Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft. . . . Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, . . . you have only to consider the power which our city possesses and which has been won by those very qualities which I have mentioned. . . . For our adventurous spirit has forced an entry into every sea and into every land; and everywhere we have left behind us everlasting memorials of good done to our friends or suffering inflicted on our enemies."

[Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Book 2, 39-41)]

(3)

Laches' begins his speech with a subtle mocking of Nicias, noting that "it is hard to say about any study at all that one must not learn it, for it seems good to know all things"(182e). He then proceeds to dismiss fighting in armor quite thoroughly. He prefaces his discussion by defining the lines along which fighting in armor may be assessed, identifying three possibilities (182e):

1) It is a study, the teachers are genuine, it is beneficial (i.e., "of the sort that Nicias says"), thus it should be learned.
2) It is not a study, hence the teachers must be deceivers, it cannot be truly beneficial, and thus it should not be learned.
3) It is a study, but not something serious, thus it is not sufficiently beneficial to be worthy of being learned.

Now, whereas Nicias gave seven reasons in favor of fighting in armor, Laches responds with seven reasons against it. Laches' first point is that if fighting in armor were important to know (i.e., "if there were something to this"; 182e), the Lacedaemonians would practice it, since they have no other care in life but to "gain the advantage over others in war" (183a). One should notice that the basis of Laches' remarks is *reputation*. Unlike Nicias, who "theorized" about fighting in armor, Laches will confine his remarks to the realm of *deeds*. The Lacedaemonians, whom he has surely seen, are well reputed for their courage and skill in warfare. If *they* don't practice fighting in armor,

nobody should. Though Laches' implicit rationale is not a fool proof one, it is likely valid in the context. For reputation often *is* an excellent (though never perfect) indicator of some things, and not least to be considered in this respect is as an indicator with respect to war[43]. Of course, there are also things about which reputation is not reliable. When one begins to think about why, when, and about what 'reputation' is and is not reliable, it seems that it is a matter of assessing the judgment of those who bestow the reputation. That is, there are certain topics of which 'the many' have the requisite knowledge to judge (for example, physical beauty or physical strength), and others which 'the many' do not have the capacity to judge (for example, wisdom).

But Laches' words point to something somewhat problematic inasmuch as they come from an Athenian general. For Sparta is locked in war with Athens, each believing itself the greater military power. Moreover, one sees clearly from Thucydides that Athens believes its superiority over others to be in large part due to qualities (such as boldness and intelligence) which they believe *unique* to themselves. They do not really want to be 'completely-Spartan' to defeat the Spartans, nor would it be particularly wise of them to do so considering their differing political regimes and the subsequent differing educations of each (i.e., a Spartan is raised to be nothing but a *Spartan*)[44].

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[43]For example, a modern day country seeking to better its army could do a lot worse for itself than to model its army on the U.S. army (i.e., the most powerful army in the modern world).

[44]Though one ought to bear in mind that human virtue is virtue in whomever, one wants also to bear in mind the possibility that *civic* virtue is more particular in nature. For example, the Spartan regime might require piety over boldness so as to promote its particular civic arrangement, whereas the Athenian regime might require the opposite.

Laches' second point strengthens his first by describing the teachers of this special 'fighting in armor'. For they seek honor and money, and yet avoid the very place where one would suppose they could attain the most honor and money: Sparta. Instead, they will not "set foot on it on tiptoe", but go around it as if it were "sacred ground", putting on their display for everyone else, "especially for those who would themselves agree that many are superior to them in the things of war" (183b). Indeed, this goes far in strengthening Laches' reasoning. Whereas Stesilaus is putting on his display in Athens, the Athenian general is thus implying that Sparta is superior to Athens in the things pertaining to war.

Laches argues from analogy, likening the matter of war and Sparta to tragic poetry and Athens. Of course, if the dialogue's dramatic date reminds one of Aristophanes' hovering presence, Laches' words should remind one that not only the tragic poet but the comic poet procures money and honor in Athens. Might the unmusical Laches believe that it is precisely Athens emphasis on these things that causes their inferiority to Sparta in war?

Laches' third point is that he has seen fighting in armor displayed where it truly counts -- on the actual battlefield -- and he was not at all impressed. Laches makes his fourth and closely related point, saying: "As if on purpose, of those who have practiced this business of armor, no man has ever become highly esteemed in war. And yet in all other things, those who win a name for themselves come from those who have practiced each thing; but compared to others, as it seems, these have been very unfortunate indeed in this respect" (184c). Indeed, Laches' sarcasm at this point is a witty way of strengthening his argument. For one does have to wonder if there is something deficient in this "fighting in armor"

when none of its practitioners has become famous for the very military prowess it claims to provide. Furthermore, since Laches has raised the issue here of becoming "highly esteemed in war", to which becoming a general would be the natural goal or progression, one should recall how Nicias argued that fighting in armor would lead to the study of tactics and then to the art of the whole general. It seems, then, that fighter's in armor have thus far been unable to prove themselves in battle, not to mention becoming generals.

Laches' fifth point is the rhetorical climax of his argument. Laches has seen this very Stesilaus in action and he distinguished himself only in looking ridiculous. Laches' account of this episode is one of the comedic highlights of the dialogue. The essential points of the hilarious story are as follows. While serving on shipboard, Stesilaus was a soldier who not only stood out himself, but had a strange weapon which stood out as well. He had devised a scythe attached to a spear, and while attacking alongside an enemy ship it became entangled in the ship's tackle. Stesilaus was unable to free his weapon, despite his attempts to do so as the two ships glided by each other. In the end he was forced to let go of his weapon and leave it hanging in the other ship while everybody (both enemies and comrades) had a big laugh at Stesilaus' expense.

Indeed, this story about Stesilaus presents several interesting points. For as Schmid nicely puts it, "The weapon wielded the warrior, not vice-versa"[45]. It seems, then, that Stesilaus would have done better to depend on his own courage (like the other men on the ship) rather than on his "clever device" to give him an advantage over his enemies. Not that a

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[45]Schmid, p. 68.

scythe attached to a spear might not be a formidable weapon - it very well could be - but Stesilaus certainly seems not man enough to make any good use of it.

But Laches' likely point in telling the story lies in its delicious irony. For Stesilaus claims the ability to make warriors more proficient while he himself appears to be anything but[46]. Moreover, Stesilaus lacked the appearance of gracefulness and terribleness which Nicias claims that this art is able to teach. However, one ought to notice that the comedic story of Stesilaus really has nothing to do with the 'art' in question. That is, the story has nothing to do with fighting in armor, but rather, it only undermines respect for this particular teacher. Indeed, Laches' seven points do not directly address his original question as to whether or not fighting in armor is an important "study". Instead, he offers 'circumstantial evidence' that it isn't.

Having challenged the positive value of the 'art' in question, and having undermined respect for Stesilaus generally, and incidentally if only obliquely addressed Nicias' seventh point, Laches speaks next of the possible detrimental effects fighting in armor would have on its practitioner with respect to war and reputation. In his sixth point, he says that if someone cowardly were to go into battle trusting in his having learned 'fighting in armor', it would only serve to make him bolder, reckless, lead him to over-extend himself, and thus expose him for the coward he is. One sees from this that Laches, unlike Nicias, is more thoughtful as to the danger of over-confidence. For Nicias' making a necessity of the fighter in armor's being more confident and courageous

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[46]Like sophists who claim to teach virtue and wisdom but are neither wise nor virtuous.

than he otherwise would be would seem to be a recipe for *over-confidence* and the inaccurate estimation of one's courage which is concurrent with it. But Laches' sixth point is further interesting in that it serves as a nice qualifier to Nicias' sixth point. Simply stated: if you are not courageous, you are just not courageous, and all the studies and practices in the world will not *make* you courageous. So while Nicias might have been right to point to a relationship between skill, confidence, and courage, Laches may be right in pointing out that there is an essential element in courage that is not some 'knowledge' that is simply learnable[47]. Schmid puts this succinctly in saying that in Laches' opinion superior knowledge or skill, like armor, "might clothe, but it will not transform the man"[48].

Laches' seventh point is that if a fighter in armor were actually courageous, he "would be under close watch from human beings" (184b). This is because other people would be lying in wait, eager for the first chance to find some fault in the man. If the fighter in armor makes "even a small mistake, he would receive great slanders" (184b-c). Thus, Laches asserts, the only way such a one can "escape becoming ridiculous" is if he is distinguished from others in virtue to an "amazing degree" (184c). But one might wonder why the risk of envy and slander is so particular with fighting in armor? Is it because this art "will provide people with the opportunity to attribute even his courage to this knowledge"[49]? Perhaps.

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[47] A reader who was familiar with Plato's *Republic* would suspect that this essential element is none other than that same thing which so characterizes Laches himself: *thumos*, 'spirit'. Cf. 375a-b.

[48] Schmid, p.69.

[49] Munro, p. 27.

But is not the larger issue the fact that war itself constitutes a special case inasmuch as it is the place where men most display their '*manliness*'[50]. Thus, war holds extraordinary rewards in terms of honor and reputation. With so much at stake, it is no wonder why others are envious of, and so ready to slander, those who threaten their claim to these honors through *their* superior manliness[51]. Thus, they will exploit any excuse to disparage rivals.

Laches' seventh point is of further interest in that it implies that even if a courageous man knew fighting in armor and were able to benefit greatly both himself and his city's army, it is still not worth learning because of the high risk of incurring a bad reputation. In the horizon of Laches' thought, it is likely the case that almost nothing is worth a bad reputation. *This* is why Laches considers fighting in armor to be a 'no-win' situation[52].

Laches concludes his response by telling Lysimachus that in his "opinion at least," fighting in armor should not be learned, the implication being that he considers it useless. However, he also reminds Lysimachus of what he told him at the beginning ("*ex arches*"): that he "must not let Socrates here go but must beg him to give counsel" (184c). Perhaps Laches is open-minded enough to entertain an objection to his speech against fighting in armor. Or perhaps he is confident that Socrates, as a proven soldier who actually had to protect himself in retreat when the Athenian ranks had been broken and scattered, will fully support him[53].

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[50]See Pericles' Funeral Oration in *Thucydides*, Book 2, 35.

[51]This point applies not just to Laches but to everyone.

[52]And it is likely that Lysimachus and Melesias will agree whole-heartedly with this appraisal since they are seeking a study which will make their children famous.

[53]Indeed, Munro argues that Laches' enthusiasm for Socrates is based on the premise

Whatever the case, Lysimachus takes Laches' advice and begs Socrates to settle the issue. Tacitly invoking a kind of democratic mode of decision-making, he invites Socrates to cast the deciding vote, adding that if Nicias and Laches would have agreed with one another, "there would be less need of such a one" (184d).

Socrates, however, balks at this, asking Lysimachus if he is going to "adopt whatever the greater number of us praise?" This perplexes Lysimachus, and he responds, "What else would one do, Socrates?" (184d). Here, Socrates draws Melesias into the conversation for the first and only time in the dialogue. Indeed, the very conspicuousness of this ought to raise questions as to *why* Socrates would do so; and related to this, why he would do so *now*. Socrates asks Melesias if, concerning his son's training for an athletic competition[54], he would obey the greater number of them, or a gymnastics expert, to which Melesias replies, "Most likely the latter, Socrates". Socrates next asks Melesias if he would obey the gymnastics expert, "rather than even four of us", to which Melesias replies, "Probably". Socrates then states his opinion that "what is to be finely judged, I think, must be judged by knowledge, not by majority", to which Melesias replies with the rhetorical question, "How could it be otherwise?"(184e).

Notice that Melesias seems unwilling to supply an answer that is unequivocal. Nor should one lose sight of the fact that Lysimachus and Melesias originally consulted Nicias and Laches *because* they regarded them as 'experts' of a sort. But Socrates, by establishing the primacy of

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that the same deeds will equal the same speeches.

[54] And as Munro rightly notes (p.32), the example of athletics raises the issue of natural ability.

knowledge as the criterion for judging, implies that they are *not* (but so very politely that no one notices). All of which opens the question as to who is the expert, pointing to the further question as to what the expert is an expert about. Socrates will soon make explicit that they in fact ought to be looking for an "expert concerning the care of the soul" (185e), the expert being the one who has "learned and practiced it and has also had good teachers" (185b). But to get Lysimachus and Melesias to understand this, Socrates has to 'raise the stakes' by appealing to their 'love of their own'. He reminds the two old men that what they have at stake is "the greatest of your possessions": how their sons turn out will directly affect how their "whole house" will be governed (185a). Not Lysimachus' and Melesias' souls[55], but the only thing that will certainly outlive them: the reputation that is theirs through their sons' governance of the house. Only now does Melesias give unequivocal replies, saying, "What you say is true." And again, when Socrates suggests that for this reason they must "have much forethought for it", Melesias confidently replies, "Certainly" (185a). But most important to note here is how Socrates has changed their goal from their sons becoming *famous* to their sons becoming *"good"*. He is able to accomplish this because the men, at this point at least, presume a notion of "good" that will result in fame.

Before continuing, however, one must attempt to answer the question as to why Socrates has directed the conversation to Melesias. Is it not because it is Melesias who ought best to appreciate the problematic nature of democracy (as represented by the mode of decision-making which Lysimachus had originally intended)? For Melesias' renowned

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[55] I.e., what a more thoughtful person might hold to be the greatest of his possessions.

father "led the aristocratic party opposed to the democratic party of Pericles"[56]. Moreover, Melesias himself "is mentioned by the historian Thucydides as having been a member of the Four Hundred, an oligarchic regime that ruled Athens briefly late in the Peloponnesian War"[57].

Socrates clarifies his example of Melesias' son's gymnastic education, asking Melesias if the expert is the one who has learned, practiced, and had good teachers of the thing. Again, this example of the gymnastics expert is especially pertinent with regards to Melesias. For Socrates says in the *Meno* that "besides educating them well in other respects", Thucydides also made his two sons (i.e., Melesias and Stephanus) "the finest wrestlers of Athenians" (94b-c), by putting each under a single highly reputed expert. Perhaps because of this Melesias replies, "In my opinion, at least." When Socrates asks him if they should determine exactly what they are looking for an expert in, old Melesias becomes perplexed, saying, "What do you mean?" Socrates proceeds to explain, and in so doing he at last brings their inquiry to its proper beginning.

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[56]Nichols, n. 2, (p. 240).
[57]Ibid.

"He who is a teacher from the very heart takes all things seriously only with reference to his students – even himself."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Beyond Good and Evil, Maxims and Interludes***(63)]

(4)

Socrates says that they need to agree with each other "from the beginning" (or, "from the foundation"; "*ex arches*"; 185b). This foundation must be an agreement as to what it is they are deliberating about and examining which of them is an expert. Here Nicias re-enters the conversation, also expressing his puzzlement: did they not already agree that they are examining whether or not young men should learn fighting in armor?[58] Socrates gracefully concedes that they *are* examining fighting in armor, ("Most certainly, Nicias."), but explains why their discussion about fighting in armor must begin with an agreement on something more fundamental. He provides Nicias two examples, each throwing additional light on the issue.

In Socrates' first example, he asks Nicias, "[W]hen someone examines a drug for the eyes, to see whether he should smear it on or not, do you think that the deliberation then is about the drug or the eyes?", to which Nicias replies, "About the eyes" (185c). Nicias is right, of course, for the drug is not deliberated upon in and of itself, but only in relation to the nature of the eye (its present defect, or vice, in relation to its state of health, or virtue). But this is not the end of the matter. The eye and it's nature is not deliberated upon as an end in itself, being but a part of the greater whole that is the body. This implicitly raises the question: is the body an end it itself? Indeed, if the body exists for the sake of the soul,

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[58]Looking ahead at Nicias' claim to be thoroughly acquainted with 'Socratic' discussions (187e-188c), Sprague (p.8) makes the excellent point that Nicias' question here is so naive that it casts serious doubt on the later claim.

the relevant question is whether or not the men are treating fighting in armor as an end in itself, as opposed to a means through which the youth's soul will benefit[59].

Now Socrates provides Nicias a second example, saying, "Then too, when someone examines whether or not, and when, a bridle should be put on a horse presumably he is then deliberating about the horse, not about the bridle?", to which Nicias replies, "True" (185d). However, upon closer examination one might reply, "True, but . . . ". For such a deliberation is not for the sake of the horse's good but for the sake of the rider's. Thus the example raises the question: is their deliberation about fighting in armor solely for the good of the youths in question, or are there ulterior purposes?

Socrates now offers an important generalization which might serve as a kind of deliberative 'rule of thumb': "Then in a word: when someone examines one thing for the sake of another, the deliberation happens to be about that thing for the sake of which he was examining, not about that which he was seeking for the sake of the other" (185d). Nicias agrees that this is "necessarily" so (185d), and one wants to keep this 'rule of thumb' in mind throughout the inquiry.

At this point, Socrates says that they "must therefore examine the counselor also" (185d), taking the lead in guiding them, explicitly asking if they "are examining a study for the sake of the souls of the young men?" Nicias confirms the suggestion and the stage is properly set: they are to deliberate on the human soul. But Socrates then says, "Which of us is expert concerning the care of the soul and able to do a fine job of caring

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[59]See Plato's *Charmides*, 156b-157c.

for this, and which of us has had good teachers of this, must therefore be examined" (185e). It seems that Socrates has just contradicted his rule of thumb, since they ought first to examine what the counselor is a counselor for the sake of[60]. At this point, however, Laches re-enters the conversation. Since his intervention is spontaneous, the question he poses, and the motivation behind it, is worth considering.

Socrates has insisted throughout the preceding discussion that they not only find which of them is expert in that thing for the sake of which they are deliberating, but that these people must also have had "good teachers". Might Socrates be deliberately provoking Laches with this? Whatever the case, Laches interrupts the conversation, saying, "What Socrates? Have you never seen men become more expert in some things without teachers than with teachers?" (185e). Perhaps Laches' pride takes issue with the insinuation that *his* soul is somehow lacking for having never had such a teacher. Indeed, one may suspect that what compels Laches to come into the conversation in this fashion is the fact that Socrates' argument has thus far ignored the possibility of being a 'self-made man'. Laches takes offense at this idea and in the process belittles the value of traditional style education[61], not necessarily because he would feel it unprofitable, but because it is not *necessary* for the naturally

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[60]One might argue that Socrates has not so much 'contradicted' himself as he has provided a subtle puzzle. For how could they know who is an expert concerning the care of the soul if they did not understand the soul and how it ought to be cared for? Moreover, how could they know the latter without therefore being experts themselves? However, granting the validity of this paradox (which should not escape the reader's notice), Socrates will go on to speak of the expert's teachers, students, and reputation, and this *is* a deviation from the deliberation on the soul (which does not start until the dialogue's center).

[61]I.e., an education based on an explicit teacher/student relationship.

gifted. Recall that Laches is spirited and loves honor, most clearly shown in his obsession with the things which most produce honor: deeds, and reputation for deeds. Thus, he cannot help but take issue with Socrates' insistence that an expert must have had teachers: self-made men can 'learn by doing' *without* the aid of teachers, and the *less* a person owes to others for his achievements, the more he distinguishes himself from 'the many' (and this very distinction is what increases his honor). Socrates' insistence here ignores the 'virtue' of self-sufficiency and the natural aptitude which accompanies 'self-made men'. Thus, there is an implicit reference on Laches' part to nature and natural ability.

Socrates' response is interesting. He agrees with Laches, thus tacitly recognizing the possibility that natural aptitude assiduously cultivated by practice can make one an expert without the aid of teachers. For Socrates appreciates the possibility that someone may *learn* something without having been *taught* it. Were it not for this possibility, there would be an infinite regress as concerns the origins of knowledge. Yet Socrates responds to Laches, "But you would not be willing to trust them, if they claimed they were good craftsmen, unless they could show you some work of their art that was well done, both one and more" (i.e., "not only one, but many"; 185e). Notice that he addresses Laches personally, saying "*you* would not be willing to trust them". As Laches showed in his critique of fighting in armor, he favors what he can see (or has seen) with his own eyes. He is not interested in the theoretical side of things, and mistrustful of mere talk. Rather, he wants always to *see* the practical results. Socrates is not unaware of this quality in Laches' character and proceeds with this in mind. Accordingly, Laches whole-heartedly agrees: "What you say here is true" (186a).

Now, rather than examine the soul *per se* (i.e., that thing for the sake of which they are examining the counselor), Socrates proceeds with the topic of the expert. He clarifies to Nicias and Laches that they have been summoned by Lysimachus and Melesias because the latter two are eager that their sons' souls "become as good as possible". All that is left is to discover which of either Socrates, Nicias, or Laches meets the criteria of the expert. However, Socrates has other things in mind, one of which is to disqualify himself as a candidate[62].

Socrates has no difficulty excluding himself as a candidate, making the criterion for a competent teacher point against himself in several ways. He first says that the candidate amongst them must "claim" that he can fit the criterion, next requiring that the candidate "show them the teachers" they have had. Moreover, the teachers whom they show must be "themselves manifestly good" (186a). Now, the good man is likely to be "manifestly" so to other good men, but it is not at all necessary that he will be "manifestly" so to everybody, and especially not to 'the many'. In any case, Socrates further requires that this good man must have "cared for the souls of many youths and have taught us" (186ab).

But Socrates has conceded to Laches' point that some can become experts without teachers. In that case, he must "show" them what humans have become good because of him, be they Athenians or foreigners, slaves or free men. But how will they know if this human is

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[62]Socrates will not, and never does, explicitly refer to himself as a teacher or expert in the care of the soul. Recall how Socrates explicitly denied in the *Apology* that he was ever a teacher, saying , "I have never been anyone's teacher, but if anyone, whether younger or older, desired to hear me speaking and doing my own things, I never begrudged it to him" (33a). Of course, the irony of this statement lies in the subtlety of Socrates' clever form of pedagogy, which relies fundamentally on teaching by example.

truly good or not? By "general agreement" (186b). There is a comic element to Socrates' criterion for the competent teacher inasmuch as they would have to ignore the point Socrates just made with Melesias (i.e., that what is to be finely judged must be judged by knowledge and not majority opinion). For all of these criteria take their bearing from 'the many' on whom such evaluations necessarily depend. Keeping in mind that it is *fame* which Lysimachus and Melesias are seeking for their sons, none of this strikes them as at all inappropriate. *If* these criterion are considered genuine by Socrates, he himself would never fit the standard (especially by the end of his life). Indeed, seeing the comic element to Socrates' criterion for the competent teacher leads one to see the paramount issue in this respect: why is being good *oneself* not considered by Socrates as adequate proof of one's competence? This suggests the related question: can virtue (and especially courage) even be taught?

Socrates says that if none of these things is available to any of them they will have to seek other men than themselves. Indeed, Socrates takes this whole matter very seriously, even calling it a "dangerous risk" (187b). He says that they "must not run the risk, with the sons of men who are comrades, of corrupting them and thus getting the greatest blame from the nearest relatives." One sees here a transparent reference to Socrates' fate, but also in Plato's portrayal of him a defense against the charges upon which he was condemned.

Socrates proceeds, denying that he has had a teacher: "I ... am the first to say about myself that I have not had a teacher in this", despite his having desired the thing since his youth (186c). Being roughly 45 years old in this dialogue, he has been harboring this desire for about 30 years. Being poor, he has no money to pay sophists, "the only ones who

proclaim themselves able to make me noble and good", and he has been unable on his own "to discover the art" (186c).

Socrates thus claims that he would not be amazed if Nicias or Laches discovered or learned this art, since they are older and have more money than him. Indeed, he thinks they are capable of educating a human being, because "they would never make fearless declarations about good and bad practices for a youth, unless they trusted themselves to have adequate knowledge" (186d). This carries the implication that 'fearlessness' without "adequate knowledge" is rash, bold, or even stupid (and this is quite similar to Nicias' later distinction between courage and fearlessness at 197a-b).

Having successfully disqualified himself as an "expert", Socrates turns the tables on Nicias and Laches, begging Lysimachus "not to let Laches or Nicias go", just as Laches recently admonished him "not to let" Socrates "go" (186d). He denies that he "understands the affair" of the rearing of the young or is capable of judging which of the two men "speaks truly"— this on account of his having "neither discovered nor learned *anything* about such things." However, it is quite clear from this very dialogue that Socrates knows *something* about the care of the soul. For the dialogue shows that cultivating the virtue of courage is involved in the care of the soul, and Socrates will somehow show Nicias and Laches that neither of them spoke the whole truth about courage. So, Socrates' claim that he does not know the answers concerning such things, even if true, would not negate the fact that he *does* know not only the right questions to be asked, but also which 'answers' are inadequate. In a word, Socrates has likely learned and/or discovered a lot about wrong answers,

and this is at least a type of knowledge[63]. It seems, then, that Socrates is *not* being altogether 'frank' here.

Socrates proceeds, asking Nicias and Laches whether they have learned or discovered this art of the "care of the soul", saying that if they learned it, they must tell who this "teacher" is and what other people are "expert in the same art with them". This is so that if they (Nicias and Laches) have no "leisure" to teach, they can persuade these other teachers to take care of all of "our children" (187a). Several things need to be noticed here. Firstly, Socrates has changed the issue into Nicias' and Laches' being comprehensive teachers themselves, as opposed to mere advisors on some martial art. Secondly, Socrates describes the man (if he exists) whom it would be appropriate to go to concerning the rearing of the young as "terribly clever" (actually, as "*cleverer*"). This might remind one of that person whom Athens suspected of being himself "terribly clever" at speaking: Socrates[64]. Thirdly, Socrates implies that this "clever" man must have the "leisure" which the politically and publicly active Nicias and Laches do not (i.e., precisely the kind of leisure which Socrates evidently has; 180c). Fourthly, Socrates implies that this man could be persuaded through gifts or favors or both to take care of the children. But would this really work? And if so, what kind of 'payment' would such a man be interested in?

Socrates proceeds, reminding the men that the purpose of their sons' educations is so that "they will not put their ancestors to shame by becoming paltry" (187a). Thus, their goal is to make the children

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[63]For example, one might not know what the square root of 12 is, but one could still know that it is not 2 or 3 or 4 or 5, and so on.

[64]*Apology*, 17a-b.

complete gentlemen, (i.e., "noble and good from having been paltry"), and he tells Nicias and Laches that if they have already achieved this with some children, they must show them these children as examples (187a-b). Warning them of the risk involved in the education of the young, Socrates tells the men to "watch out lest the dangerous risk that is risked should be not with some Carian but with your sons and with the children of friends...", which he likens to the folly of beginning "pottery on a wine jar" (187b). He finishes by telling the men to answer which of these categories is applicable and appropriate to them - something neither Nicias or Laches ever do in the dialogue - and implores Lysimachus not to "let the men go until they have done so"[65].

Several things need be noted about this passage. Firstly, consider Socrates' likening the rearing of the young to "pottery". For the potter must have an idea in mind as to the end result that is finest. Furthermore, there are *various* useful clay objects, as well as beautiful and 'useless' ones, suggesting that pedagogy might similarly have a variety of aims. However, when one looks more closely at Socrates' analogy, one notices a real incongruity. For unlike a failed clay-pottery experiment, a failed 'soul-pottery' experiment involves incomparably greater risk. One can just throw out a disfigured pot, but it is not so easy to dispose of a defective human being; nor does one have the luxury of experimenting on some "Carian". These are 'our' youths, and if one fails in their education the entire polity may pay the price for the mistake. Indeed, this certainly is a "dangerous risk" in several respects. For firstly, one runs the risk of greatly harming the soul of a fellow human being. Secondly, one runs the

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[65]Schmid's translation.

risk of unleashing this disfigured soul on to his friends and family[66], and even the greater polity. Thirdly, and related, one runs the risk of all of their hatred and resentment -- and retribution -- being visited upon oneself. Fourthly, if one is successful, one runs the risk of other people's envy. Of course, the example of Socrates' having been put to trial and executed by Athens for being a 'corrupter of the young' (amongst other charges) is a present reminder as to just what a "dangerous risk" is involved to the teacher. One sees from all this that responsible pedagogy might itself require considerable courage.

Lysimachus believes that "what Socrates says is fine" (187c). He says that if Nicias and Laches are willing to give an account of themselves in this matter, he and Melesias would be pleased to hear them do so. He reminds them that he "began at the start" (literally, *"ex archés"*; 187c) by telling them that one of the reasons the two of them in particular were summoned as counselors was because of their own children, about which he presumes they would be concerned; this seems like a polite way of encouraging their compliance with Socrates' proposal. He further tells them, if they are willing, to "speak and examine *in common* with Socrates" (187d). He finishes the speech by agreeing with what Socrates earlier discussed with Melesias. Namely, that the governance of their "whole house" (185a) is "the greatest of our things" (187d). Finally, he asks Nicias and Laches how they are going to proceed.

At this point, Nicias tells Lysimachus that he clearly has no experience with Socrates as an adult. Lysimachus is perplexed as to Nicias' point, and so Nicias proceeds to explain. He begins by likening a

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[66]Witness especially, Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

"very close" conversation with Socrates to a "kinship", namely, a 'kinship of souls in speech', having its own very peculiar qualities. According to Nicias, whatever you begin talking to Socrates about, you "must of necessity" give "an account of" yourself (187e-188a). Here one might wonder whether this is why Nicias did not originally invite Socrates into their conversation. Whatever the case, Nicias describes this process as one where Socrates causes the person to be "led around in speech" until the person "falls into" self-examination. This self-examination consists of giving an account of your past life and your present self. Once this process has begun, Socrates "will not let him go" until all has been put "to the test" (188a).

Nicias says that he is "accustomed" to Socrates and that he knows that "it is necessary to experience these things from him" and that he himself will even now "experience" this process. But what is one to make of Nicias' saying that he "rejoices" about an experience (i.e., self-examination) which he describes in terms which makes it sound more painful than pleasurable? Well, the prospect of self-examination making one better is indeed confidence-inspiring, yet the process itself is nothing less than vexing. For the easiest thing one can be towards oneself is complacent, and perhaps the hardest thing one can be towards oneself is rigorously self-critical. Thus, Nicias might actually have 'mixed feelings' towards Socrates' company[67]. Nicias claims not to flee from Socrates, though arguably he *cannot* flee because he is politely trapped. Nonetheless, he does profess to believe that the process makes him "more

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[67] And this would not be unlike Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (see 215e-216c).

forethoughtful for his life afterward"[68] and that it is good to continue learning in old age as Solon says of himself[69]. Nicias concludes, confessing that he has known all along that "with Socrates present, our speech would be not about the lads but about ourselves" (188b)[70]. He says *he* is willing to continue the conversation with Socrates, but asks, "[S]ee how Laches here stands concerning such a thing" (188c).

Whereas Nicias spoke only of Socrates' speeches and said nothing of Socrates the man, Laches will emphasize the speaker over the speech. He starts his response by saying that his "situation concerning speeches is simple". Laches, with a touch of irony[71], immediately corrects this statement and tells Nicias that his situation is "not simple but double." He says that this is so because he "might seem to someone to be a lover of speech and, in turn, a hater of speech" (188c). He explains that when he hears a man "discussing virtue or some wisdom who is truly a man and worthy of the speeches that he is uttering", that he rejoices "extraordinarily" upon seeing that the speaker's speeches and deeds are "harmonious with each other" (188c-d). Such a man, as Laches sees it, is "altogether musical", having "tuned himself to the finest harmony, not on the lyre or instruments of play, but really to live his own life as a concord of speeches in relation to deeds". Laches holds this condition to be

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[68] And one should probably take this sentiment of his seriously since, as shall later be seen, Nicias is somewhat obsessed with forethought.

[69] As Schmid notes (p. 86), Nicias misquotes Solon by substituting *manthanein* ("to learn", which has the connotation of "learning for oneself and intellectual learning) for the correct word *didaskein ("to instruct"*, which "includes the connotation of learning how to live"). There is likely a real irony in Nicias' emphasis on "learning for oneself".

[70] Again, perhaps this is why Nicias did not originally invite Socrates into their conversation.

[71] I.e., in light of the dual meaning of "simple".

distinctly "Dorian", which he believes to be "the sole Greek *harmonia*" (188d).

Laches continues the thought, saying, "When such a one gives voice, therefore, he makes me rejoice and seem to anyone to be a lover of speech, so eagerly do I accept from him the things said". For Laches considers the man "worthy of the speeches that he is uttering", as having proven his *right* to discuss "virtue or some wisdom" (188c-d). Laches concludes the thought by saying, "[B]ut he who does the contrary to this [man] pains me, all the more the better he seems to speak, and makes me seem to be a hater of speech". Understandably, Laches is pained by 'hypocrites' who are 'all talk and no action'.

Laches says that he (unlike Nicias) is "not experienced in Socrates' speeches, but, it seems, I formerly had experience of his deeds, and there I found him to be worthy of noble speeches and of complete frankness" (188e-189a) -- clearly a reminder of his and Laches' own war-like valor at Delium. Laches says that if Socrates "has this as well", (i.e., complete frankness as well as noble speeches), "his wishes are mine, and I would be scrutinized by such a one with great pleasure and would not be vexed at learning" (188e-189a)[72].

Continuing, Laches also endorses Solon's saying (which Nicias introduced), though he qualifies it by saying that he is "willing in growing old being taught many things but only by worthy men" - a qualification which he asks the men to concede to him so that he not be "revealed to be a poor learner by learning without pleasure" (189a). Laches' only concern is that "the teacher himself be good", saying that "it is no concern to me if

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[72]Whereas Nicias said merely that it is "not unpleasing".

the teacher is younger[73] or not yet a [man] of reputation or anything else of that sort", presumably turning to Socrates to add, "To you, then, Socrates, I give the command both to teach and to refute me however you wish and to learn whatever I, in turn, know" (189b). Laches' giving Socrates "the command" to teach and refute him reminds one that Laches is a no-nonsense man, a general who is used to giving orders. One also sees here that Laches thinks that he 'knows' things and that Socrates can learn from him. He seems to believe that they are equals here in the same way in which he believes that they were equals in courage at Delium[74]. Laches goes on to say something rather revealing of himself. For he says that at Delium Socrates gave of his "own virtue proof which he who is to give proof justly must give" (189b). Thus, he implicitly identifies courage ('manliness') with virtue *per se* (i.e., not *a* virtue), as though they are synonymous.

Socrates says that they will not "blame [Nicias and Laches] it seems, for not being ready both to consult and to examine together" (189c). His inserting "it seems" into the sentence might bespeak a suspicion on his part as to one or the other's 'pedagogic sincerity'[75]. At this point Lysimachus re-enters the conversation. Having heard Socrates highly praised again, he can hardly pass up the opportunity of putting Socrates

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[73]Knowing that Socrates is younger than Laches, this reference to the teacher's age is likely a polite reference to Socrates. But what about his reference to the man's not yet being of "reputation"? Might this also be a polite reference to Socrates? *If* so, this would point to the dialogues dramatic date as being almost definitely 'pre-*Clouds*'.

[74]One ought perhaps to recall that Alcibiades held a higher estimation of Socrates' courage. See *Symposium* (221a), where Socrates is said to have been more "in possession of his *mind*". As shall later be seen, Laches' understanding of courage initially neglects the role of mind.

[75]Or perhaps questioning the sincerity of the both of them.

to his good use, saying, "Indeed the work is ours, Socrates, for I, at least, put you down as one of us" (189c).

Lysimachus tells Socrates to take his place on behalf of the young men, inquiring of Nicias and Laches what needs to be inquired about, giving counsel and discussing the issues with them. He says that he requires this of Socrates on account of his old age, which causes him to forget many things which he intends to ask and not remember what he hears, "if other speeches come in between" (189cd). Schmid[76] translates the words "in between" (*metaxu*) as "in the middle", pointing out that Plato has Lysimachus do the favor of actually indicating the middle of the dialogue! Indeed, the very center of the dialogue is in Socrates' next speech. Though Schmid contends that Lysimachus' comments actually show how he is going to forget the entire philosophic inquiry into courage, one might wonder (rather) whether Lysimachus is here being 'un-frank' about his memory so as to shift responsibility for the discussion to Socrates. After all, his long opening speech showed no evidence of declined memory. Whatever the case, Lysimachus says, "I shall listen and, having heard, will then with Melesias here do what seems good to you" (189d). Of the three counselors, Lysimachus has indicated that Socrates' decision will be given priority.

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[76]Schmid, p. 89.

"He exercised fascination as this extreme case – his fear-inspiring ugliness expressed it *for every eye to see*: he fascinated even more, it goes without saying, as the answer, as the solution, as the apparent *cure* for this case."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Twighlight of the Idols***, *The Problem of Socrates* (9)]

"[O]ne must *imitate Socrates* and counter the dark desires by producing a permanent *daylight*–the daylight of reason".

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Twighlight of the Idols***, *The Problem of Socrates*(10)]

(5)

The dialogue's central speech begins with Socrates making it a necessity that he and Nicias and Laches "obey" (or, "be persuaded by") Lysimachus and Melesias (189d). He then suggests that it is "perhaps" not a bad thing that they scrutinize themselves and examine "what teachers of such education have we had or what others have we made better." Is the reader going to see what teachers Socrates has had? Or alternatively, Socrates himself making others better? These questions are the more tantalyzing, given that Socrates says that he thinks he knows of another sort of examination which would "lead to the same thing" (189e) as the two questions he just raised. Moreover, this other mode of examination, Socrates says, "[W]ould start somewhat more from the beginning" (literally, "*ex arches*"; 189e). Notice that Socrates presumes to know the examination's beginning, its goal, and alternative ways to better achieve it. But continuing, Socrates' new examination begins with the premise that:

> "[I]f we happen to know, about anything whatever, that which, when present in something, makes that thing in which it is present better, and if we are furthermore able to make it be present in that thing, it is clear that we know this very thing concerning which we would be counselors as to how someone might obtain it in the easiest and best fashion. Now then, perhaps you do not understand what I mean, but you will understand more easily as follows.
>
> If we happen to know that sight, when present in eyes, makes those eyes in which it is present better, and if we are furthermore able to make it be present in eyes, it is clear that we know what sight itself is, concerning which we would be counselors as to how someone might obtain it in the easiest and best fashion. For if we do not know even this thing – what sight is or what hearing is – we would hardly be counselors worthy of

> mention and doctors concerning either eyes or ears, as to the way in which someone might obtain hearing or sight in the finest manner" (189e-190b).

Laches replies, "What you say is true, Socrates". The philosopher concludes this rich analogy with his telling Laches that the issue is whether or not they know what virtue is, so that they can put it into the youths' souls to make them better (190b).

It is not difficult to see why Laches understands quickly and confidently what Socrates means: if one knows how to put sight into eyes then they must surely know what sight is, for how else would they know what they are putting into the eyes? Furthermore, if one does not know what sight is, then clearly one would not know how to put it into a person's eyes, (much less in the "easiest and best fashion"). All of this would seem exactly the same with respect to hearing. Now, Laches would not claim to know how to put seeing into eyes or hearing into ears, but this would be on account of his ignorance of the medical art (i.e. he does not claim to be a doctor), not on account of his not knowing what hearing or seeing *is*. For does not every normal person know what hearing and seeing are?

This question must be answered both "yes" and "no". For it is unlikely that many people can give an adequate theoretical account of "what sight *is* or what hearing *is*" (190a), yet most everyone 'knows' what they are in an experiential sense. The question to ask, then, is whether virtue in general or courage in particular is somehow analogous to seeing and hearing in this respect. Indeed, Laches himself may serve as an example of someone who knows what courage is through the experience of acting courageously. Moreover, the *experience* of these two things is literally basic to any theoretical account of them. Thus the analogy would

seem to suggest that this is likewise the case with any theoretical account of virtue[77].

Expanding the analogy indicates that just as sight and hearing are inherent powers of eyes and ears, as well as being the perfection of their nature (i.e., their *telos*), virtue is likewise an inherent power of the soul and its natural perfection. Moreover, though the central passage speaks of both hearing and sight, the emphasis is clearly on the example of sight. So, why has Plato chosen to use the example of "sight" in the central passage of a dialogue which is ostensibly about courage? Is this his subtle way of reminding the reader how 'visible' courage is?

Reflecting further on the analogy reminds one that knowing what virtue and vice is, is a very different thing from knowing how to put it into someone's soul. Knowledge of the former obviously does not imply the latter. Secondly, even if one knew how to do the latter, its accomplishment would require that the soul in question is itself naturally able and willing to have this put into it. Perhaps this is why Socrates qualifies the point with an "if", (saying, "and *if* we are furthermore able to make it be present in that thing"). But deliberating more on the analogy in this respect, one might be inclined to consider it 'strange'. For Socrates speaks of being "able to make it [sight] be present in eyes". Can anyone do this? Strictly speaking, no[78]. So what might the analogy be implying about virtue in this respect? Just as no one can make sight present in blind eyes, no one can possibly *make* virtue present in a soul that (for whatever reason) lacks the natural capacity for it.

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[77]Indeed, one ought also to consider in this context the felt experience of *lacking* courage.

[78]Even modern medicine cannot cure congenital blindness.

Looking at the analogy from a different perspective, one must note that doctors can improve eyes and ears, but must do this by working with what is already present. So might the analogy be suggesting that the 'soul doctor' must make one better through virtue by similarly working with what is already present[79]? Moreover, this leads one to see yet another curiosity in the analogy: hearing and sight are present when one is born (or shortly thereafter); virtue is not. Indeed, Socrates notes something very close to this in *Republic*, saying, "they [i.e., moderation and courage] are really not there beforehand and are later produced by habits and exercises" (518de). Of course, this invites the question as to what kinds of "habits and exercises" would later produce virtue, leading back to the original question for which Lysimachus and Melesias have sought Nicias' and Laches' counsel: "What should they [the youths] learn or practice so as to become as good as possible" (179de).

At this point, recall that the last time Socrates spoke of "eyes" was in the context of applying drugs to them. Eyes sometimes require drugs to restore them to their natural state of health (or virtue) when some defect (or vice) is in them. Thus, a submerged topic in the central speech is how the 'eye doctor', 'ear doctor', or analogously the 'soul doctor', must know not only the virtues of the objects of which he is a doctor, but also the vices. In short, the doctor must know what does *not* constitute perfect seeing or hearing[80], and the causes of these deficiencies. So perhaps there is a way in which one could be a counselor on how to obtain virtue without knowing precisely what it is: by knowing what it is not. And in

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[79]Including one's habits and dispositions, as well as one's nature.

[80]I.e., the doctor must know not only what makes them better, but also what makes them worse.

fact, this is what one subsequently sees Socrates do: show Nicias and Laches that they do not know what courage is.

Continuing with the central passage, Schmid points out that the word *paragenomenon* can mean two quite different things: 1) "put alongside"; or, 2) "made present in"[81]. Thus far it has been treated as "made present in," but its other meaning is worth reflection. For considering it analogously, might Socrates be suggesting that the 'soul doctor' can make others better by putting virtue "alongside" their eyes and ears? One might recall here the *Theages*, where the very Aristeides of this dialogue speaks of the beneficial effect Socrates had on him just by his being spatially close to him (130a-e). For the *example* of a person can be a powerful pedagogic tool. Might, then, the very presence and example of Socrates make the people in this dialogue better[82]? Related to this, might it be the case that the sight of a man displaying courage is itself beneficial for an education aimed at engendering courage? Plato likely intends his thoughtful readers to see the possibilities of both meanings of *paragenomenon*.

At the conclusion of Socrates' speech, Laches is the first to speak, confidently affirming all that Socrates has asserted. Socrates asks Laches if the real concern is whether they can put virtue into Aristeides' and Thucydides' souls so as to make them better, to which Laches replies, "Certainly" (190b). So, Socrates takes the next obvious step, asking Laches: "Therefore must this, at least, be available already: to know what virtue is? For presumably if we did not at all know even what virtue

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[81]Schmid, p. 96.

[82]One ought to keep in mind that the dialogue's conclusion involves them all planning to get together again the next morning to search for a teacher.

happens to be, in what way would we be counselors of this for anyone, as to how he might obtain it in the finest manner?" (190b-c), to which Laches answers, "In no way, in my opinion at least, Socrates." (190c). Notice that Socrates speaks of one "*not at all*" knowing what virtue is and that this would exclude both knowledge by negation and the experiential knowledge hitherto spoken of. Accounting for this, then, it would seem that Laches' answer is absolutely correct. Moreover, note that Socrates originally said "the easiest and best fashion" (190a), but here he drops "easiest" and says simply, "the finest manner". Might this be because, where virtue is concerned, the "finest manner" is itself instrumental to gaining the finest virtue?

In any case, Socrates draws the implication that "we" (he and Laches)[83] must therefore claim to know what virtue is, to which Laches emphatically replies, "We assert it indeed." Socrates then says, "And therefore, since we know it, we could doubtless state what it is", and Laches sensibly replies, "Why not?" (190c). However, Laches' question is far more radical than he realizes. For the reader must take Laches' (or, Plato's) cue and ask: why not? Might there be a type of 'knowing' which does not admit itself to speech? Might the truth about some things -- be they too 'high' or too 'low' -- be ineffable? One might contemplate here the way in which one 'knows' colors. For it is likely that no one could possibly know how to state in speech what (for example) "red" or "blue" *is*, yet any normal person can recognize and state the particular color of any given thing. All of which, recalling the dialogue's central passage,

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[83]It might be worth noting that Socrates tacitly establishes a partnership here with Laches.

calls into question the very possibility of a theoretical account of virtue or courage, regardless of one's experiential or 'negative' knowledge of them.

"Signs of nobility: never to think of degrading our duties into duties for everybody; not to want to relinquish or share our own responsibilities; to count our privileges and the exercising of them among our *duties*."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Beyond Good and Evil, What is Noble?*** (272)]

"He who does not *want* to see what is elevated in a man looks all the more keenly for what is low and foreground in him -- and thereby gives himself away."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Beyond Good and Evil, What is Noble?*** (275)]

"To me it seems that the consummation which has overtaken these men shows us the meaning of manliness in its first revelation and in its final proof. Some of them, no doubt, had their faults; but what we ought to remember first is their gallant conduct against the enemy in defense of their native land. They have blotted out evil with good, and done more service to the commonwealth than they ever did harm in their private lives. No one of these men weakened because he wanted to go on enjoying his wealth: no one put off the awful day in the hope that he might live to escape his poverty and grow rich. More to be desired than such things, they chose to check the enemy's pride. This, to them, was a risk most glorious, and they accepted it, willing to strike down the enemy and relinquish everything else. As for success or failure, they left that in the doubtful hands of Hope, and when the reality of battle was before their faces, they put their trust in their own selves. In the fighting, they thought it more honourable to stand their ground and suffer death than to give in and save their lives. So they fled from the reproaches of men, abiding with life and limb the brunt of the battle; and, in a small moment of time, the climax of their lives, a culmination of glory, not of fear, were swept away from us."

[Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 2, 42]

6 (a)

Despite Laches' confidence in his ability to state what virtue *per se* is, Socrates suggests that to examine "the whole of virtue . . . would perhaps be rather much", proposing instead that they first "see about some part, whether we are in a capable condition for knowing" (or, "sufficiently knowing"; 190c-d), in the hope of making the examination easier. Here one might recall the dialogue's opening lines wherein Lysimachus expressed his belief that Nicias and Laches "were both sufficient to know". So, what does it mean to be in a "capable condition for knowing"? Though several 'conditions' are at work in almost any quest for knowledge, looking ahead one possibility that must be mentioned is courage.

Laches accedes to Socrates' suggestion, whereupon the latter asks him which part of virtue they ought to choose, then without waiting for a reply, immediately suggests that they choose the virtue which, "learning about armor seems to aim at", adding that it, "seems to the many, presumably, to aim at courage--isn't that so?" (190d). Note that for the first time in the dialogue "fighting in armor" is replaced by "learning about armor", and note also Socrates' qualification "seems to the many". What virtue, then, might learning about armor aim at to 'the few'?

Laches sees no problem with the opinion of 'the many', confidently answering, "Indeed it does seem so". On this basis, Socrates states that their first task is to "state what courage is" (190d). Next, they are to "examine in what way it might be present in young men, to the extent that

it can be present from practices and studies"(190e)[84]. Most notable about this passage is Socrates' raising the possibility of a limit to the potential of "practices and studies" to induce courage. Indeed, the possibility exists that "practices and studies" will not help at all in making courage be present in a person's soul. Thus, Socrates tacitly alludes to the potential importance of *nature* with respect to courage. Here one might recall Socrates' saying in the *Republic*, "Then, will horse or dog -- or any other animal whatsoever -- be willing to be courageous if it's not spirited? Haven't you noticed how irresistible and unbeatable spirit [*thumos*] is, so that its presence makes every soul fearless and invincible in the face of everything?" (375a-b)[85]. Indeed, natural *thumos* is a necessary condition for courage, but it is highly questionable whether it is a sufficient condition. Though neither the word *thumos* or *thumoeides* ever appears in the *Laches*, spiritedness may nonetheless be present in the 'action', the behavior, throughout the entire dialogue and most especially in the subsequent examination of courage.

In response to Socrates' proposal that he "try to state . . . what courage is", Laches is adamant that he can, swearing "By Zeus, Socrates, it is not hard to state" (190e). In keeping with his nature, however, Laches does not provide a general account of "what courage *is*", but rather, immediately speaks of something which can be *seen*: an example of courage in action (and arguably the preeminent example), saying, "[I]f someone should be willing to remain in the ranks and defend himself

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[84]Though they never get to this second stage in their discussion, that need not mean that it is not somehow present in the dialogue.

[85]Of course, Socrates later excludes animals from the possibility of having courage in the human sense (430b), a qualification perhaps alluded to in this passage (375a-b) by the animal's being "fearless . . . in the face of *everything*".

against the enemies and should not flee, know well that he would be courageous" (190e). Socrates, politely blaming himself for Laches' inadequate reply, says that he was "not speaking distinctly" (190e). Laches asks Socrates what he means by this, and Socrates offers to explain if he is able.

Though Socrates' first priority is to show that there are other manifestations of courage and that he is seeking a definition which can account for them all, several other things are notable in the next lines. First, as Schmid points out[86], when Socrates reformulates Laches' sentence into "[This man . . . who remains in the ranks and fights the enemies," he drops "willing" and "not running" and alters Laches' "defend himself" to "fights". By doing this, Socrates has excised the explicit characterization of the courageous act as being one of free-will and choice, and he has further eliminated reference to "not fleeing", thus to the need for suppressing the desire to run away (not that these aspects are necessarily precluded, of course). Indeed, Schmid argues that, "Laches' definition represents nothing less than the basic, traditional Greek conception of patriotic courage" and that, "This fact has not been sufficiently appreciated in the scholarly literature"[87]. In short, the answer is what one would expect from a good traditional Athenian such as Laches. This said, it is noteworthy that Laches completely overlooks Socrates' alterations -- perhaps seeing it as a simplified version, but perhaps not seeing their significance[88]. It is also interesting that when

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[86]See Schmid, p. 100-102.

[87]Citing Aristotle, Tyrtaicus and Theognis as evidence of this. Ibid, p. 101.

[88]This later alternative is more likely, inasmuch as Laches' later definition of courage initially neglects the possible ruling function of the intellect.

Laches asserts this man to be courageous, Socrates explicitly says, "And so do I" (191a).

Socrates' first point in 'clarifying' his question is that one can be courageous who "fights the enemies, not while remaining, but while fleeing" (191a). Accordingly, when Laches asks Socrates what he means by this, Socrates provides three examples, but -- conspicuously -- does not refer to what he and Laches did at Delium. Schmid's discussion of these three examples is illuminating, and well worth repeating here[89]. Schmid points out how, with respect to the first example, the barbarian Scythians "exemplify in Herodotus . . . a manner of clever or wise fighting", that they are bold and daring, and that, "This quality of bold quickness to seize an opportunity is missing from Laches' definition, which emphasizes enduring defense rather than daring attack, but boldness is . . . an essential aspect of war courage, and . . . the dominant aspect of Athenian courage".

Concerning the second example, Schmid points out how the reference to Aeneas and his horses calls attention to two decisions by Diomedes, one in which he wins the horses from Aeneas by defying fear and taking a stand, the other of which he retreats before Hector (on the "prudent Nestor's advice"), "though his heart is torn at the shame of it". Schmid further points out how the obeying knowledge of the horses and the commanding knowledge of the charioteer (i.e., Aeneas) is suggestive of the human soul and how a courageous act involves reason ruling over the other parts of the soul.

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[89]See Schmid, p. 102-105.

The third example (i.e., the battle at Platea) is in response to Laches' inability to see what Socrates is getting at and his insistence that he has spoken well, saying, "[T]he heavy-armed soldiery of the Greeks at least, fight as I am saying". But concerning the example itself, Schmid points out that it "does not fit the Spartan conduct at Platea very well, and Plato surely knew that", adding that the Greek victory at Platea was "a Keystone Kops calamity, centered on the wonderfully Spartan pigheadedness of one Amompharetus" and a certain "chickenhearted" Pausanias. All of which "hardly seems a good example to prove Socrates' point!". He further argues:

> "Socrates' description of the Spartan mode of cavalry fighting does fit quite precisely Herodotus' account of the Lacedaemonian conduct at Thermopylae under Leonidas, where he says the Spartans proved their skill by employing this very technique of battle (*Persian Wars* 7.71). Can we really suppose that Plato confused these two episodes in his mind? Of course not. The point of this example, no less than that of the others, is not only the one Socrates explicitly makes with it. What the examples show more significantly is that despite Socrates' objections to an overly rigid conception of the action of courage as "taking a stand," *this willingness is essential to courage wherever it is found*" (his italics).

Moreover, one might add two points. First, that the conduct there described points to the subordinate relation of 'raw courage' to prudential strategy as dictated by the general for the aim of victory[90]. Second, at Platea Spartan losses were light compared to the enemy's, whereas at Thermopylae they fought and died to the last man, and *that* stands as their greatest demonstration of Spartan courage.

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[90]See Munro, p.62. His conclusion there is likely right, though perhaps for the wrong reasons.

For all the value of Schmid's account, it does not exhaust the notable points in Socrates' response. Firstly, why is Socrates adamant[91] about making the point that courage can manifest itself in a type of "fleeing"? A possible answer to this question will arise later in examining the dialogue. Secondly, Socrates surely does not believe that Aeneas' horses display courage in fleeing, as he would have Laches believe. But Laches, who later attributes courage to animals (197a), himself sees no problem in this. Lastly, though first in priority, one ought to be taken aback by the reference to Aeneas as a "counselor of flight". As Nichols notes[92], "The word 'flight,' *phobos*, also means fear or fright. Socrates turns Homer to his own purpose: in the *Iliad* the epithet seems rather to mean 'counselor of fright' (viz., striking terror into his enemies)." So, what might Plato want his more careful readers to see here? Might not Socrates in some sense be such a 'counselor'?

Laches finally agrees with Socrates that courage can be manifested in fleeing, and Socrates asks his question again, though this time in a "fine manner" (191c). He proceeds to give Laches seven examples of situations which may call for courage, each requiring interpretive attention: 1) heavy-armed soldiery; 2) cavalry; 3) every form (*eidos*) of warfare; 4) dangers at sea; 5) sickness; 6) poverty; and, 7) politics. These seven he subsumes under the category of courage with respect to "pains or fears" before adding a further category of "fighting against desires or pleasures" (191d-e).

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[91]That is, Plato could have had his Laches just agree with Socrates right away, but he chose to have Socrates go back and forth with him before he accepted the point.
[92]Nichols, n.27, p. 255.

Thus the thoughtful reader is obliged to ask himself: what might courage consist of in each of these kinds of cases? Starting with the example of the "heavy-armed soldiery", one is reminded of Laches' saying (and Socrates' agreeing) that such a man shows courage when he is, "willing to remain in the ranks and defend himself against the enemies and should not flee". So, one must imagine oneself a heavily-armed soldier in the midst of battle. You would not know who in the enemies' ranks is lined up to fight you; how big, strong, skillful or courageous he is. Your task is to obey the chain of command and do your part, not knowing if the rest of the army has succeeded in *its* part, but knowing that if things go wrong it is you who will be left in the most compromising position, perhaps getting surrounded and annihilated. Moreover, running is less of an option for the hoplite than for any other type of soldier[93].

Imagine the kinds of fear such a soldier would feel. There is the fear of death; the fear of a ***painful*** death; the fear of being wounded and the pain involved in this (with the high probability that your life will never again be what it was before); even the fear that your body will not be able to hold up under the tortuous physical exertion, failing you when you needed it most. One can easily see how a great deal of courage is required in this type of warfare.

Socrates' second example is the courage of the cavalry fighter. Again, one sees the fear of death and being wounded (and the pain involved in this); for these things are really a constant with regards to warfare (which is not to say that the intensity of these fears is a constant).

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[93]One is reminded here of Nicias' argument for the "greatest benefit" of fighting in armor (182a-b).

When one attempts to imagine oneself fighting in the cavalry, one begins to see that this form of fighting has it own unique qualities. Firstly, there is the fear that your horse will go down, leaving you in a compromised position. Secondly, the cavalry-fighter must have the presence of mind properly to command his horse, thus needing the skill and courage to have horse and rider acting as if one unit. Thirdly, unlike the hoplite soldier, it is much easier to run away when one is on a horse. In this context, one might recall Alcibiades' words at *Symposium* 221a-b. For there he says that at Delium, "I had a better view of Socrates that day than at Potidaea, because I was on horseback and was *less afraid for myself*".

Deliberating on this example, one can see quickly how there seems to be more skill, more *art*, involved in this type of fighting than in the heavy-armed soldiery. Indeed, there seems to be less physical exertion, less close-contact, and less self-reliance needed here than in the heavy-armed soldiery.

Socrates subsumes these examples under the category of courage in every form of warfare. And yet, the previous examples showed that the courage required for warfare changes in kind and intensity depending on one's place in the order (i.e., one's skill, one's self-reliance, one's ability to run or to flee, the type of battle, the proportional strength of the enemy, and other such). Furthermore, this ought to remind one of the chain of command and the possibility that the general might require a different kind of courage than the men he commands.

But one cannot leave this topic of courage in warfare without asking: if war is so terrible, what, other than mere survival, is in it for the soldier such that he should take part in it with zeal? It is with this question that one sees the 'flip-side' of courage in warfare. For the battlefield – aside

from being the place where people defend what they cherish most[94] – is where men earn honor and glory. Indeed, nothing affords this opportunity for greatness so much as war. Nor can one deny the *pleasures* of war. That is, the psychic pleasure of slaying your enemies, exacting revenge, distributing justice, exerting both your will and your power over enemies – the sheer *adventure* of it. Again, one sees that these are all 'variables'. For example, the successes of war differ from man to man, but are greatest (and culminate) in the commander[95]. And is this not because great commanders are, in themselves, microcosms of the whole phenomena of war which they command[96]? Moreover, as such, they *define* the phenomena, being and harmonizing both intelligence and spirit, commanding and obeying, word and deed: the highest exemplars of the *will* and of the ideal which is "man".

Considering Socrates' next example of "dangers at sea", the paramount fear would seem to be again the fear of death, compounded by the sense of helplessness. Indeed, such occasions where there is 'no escape' might seem to afford no scope for courage or virtue[97], hence the common characterization of such a death as meaningless and tragic. Yet, sea-men sometimes act courageously and survive such calamities. Indeed, there is the chain of command, reminding one that the pilot is the ship's intelligence, thus he must 'keep his head' and not succumb to his fears, but rather, must maintain control and give the appropriate orders. Likewise, his crew must not succumb to their fears, but must follow the pilot's

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[94]God, country, family, and other such things.
[95]Though there are *definitely* exceptions to this rule.
[96]Especially victorious commanders who are themselves proven in battle.
[97]See in this context Aristotle's *NE*, 1115a28-1115b7.

orders. With individual escape being so unlikely, each man must, in his own capacity and place in the order, be steadfast, following the rule of reason while suppressing their fear of horrible death.

Socrates' fourth example is that courage can be manifested in "sickness". Here the most obvious thing is the *pain* which accompanies sickness. But what might courage with regards to sickness consist of? In the first place, it might include having the courage to face a present pain which is feared (for example, amputation) in order to enjoy some future good. And this is interesting because it indicates that this type of courage requires *forethought*[98].

Once one is afflicted with a sickness, however, there is nothing to be gained by denial. This is certainly not to say that one ought simply to 'give up', but only that one ought to accept the reality with the question: what is to be done now? To which there are various answers, each of which requires courage: to accept a painful treatment; or to steadfastly 'ride-out' the sickness with dignity, (i.e., until it passes, or perhaps throughout your life, or perhaps even until you die); or to commit suicide, or simply to refuse treatment if the life which it affords is not worth living.

Socrates' sixth example is courage with regards to "poverty". This might include maintaining one's sense of honor and dignity, perhaps requiring one to work rather than beg, or being willing to accept a low paying menial job over, say, high paying prostitution. However, the most important point of this example is that bearing up under a *life* of enduring poverty can require *strength* of spirit, and this is quite a different kind of

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[98]That thing which, as shall later be seen, Nicias is practically obsessed with.

courage than the one manifested in (for example) a battlefield emergency[99].

Concerning Socrates' last example of courage with respect to politics, note that whereas the previous examples went from the public (i.e. war) to the less public and more private (i.e. dangers at sea), to the very private domains of poverty and sickness, the present example of "politics" is a step back to the public. Indeed, politics is arguably the public realm *par excellence*. When one considers what courage with regards to politics consists of, might not a part of it concern a willingness to accept public *dishonor* on account of decisions (whereas one normally thinks of acts of courage as bringing honor)[100]. For often the 'right thing to do' might be apparent to the prudent politician but not to the people he leads or represents. Public anger, ridicule, resentment, censure, impeachment, and such are considered fearful things by most people. Furthermore, the politician must fear the consequences of his decisions in other respects. He seldom can be absolutely sure of what is best, given unforeseeable consequences. Moreover, when an individual makes a wrong decision in his private life, the effects are to a great degree felt by him alone. However, a politician's wrong decision negatively effects the whole political community. Indeed, the risks and pressures associated with this are only heightened by the politicians affections for his people[101]. All of which points to the need for courage in political life[102].

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[99]And this point is equally applicable to some of the scenario's mentioned with regards to sickness. Indeed, this might explain why Socrates' wording tacitly coupled sickness and poverty.

[100]Here one might recall Socrates' conduct concerning the trial of "the ten generals" at *Apology* 32b-c.

[101]That is, the more the politician 'loves', or, 'feels affection' for his people, the greater

Having given his seven examples, Socrates subsumes them under a category, referring to them as courage "toward pain or fears". But now he adds that courage is manifested by certain men "who are terribly clever at fighting against desires or pleasures, whether remaining or turning around in retreat" (191d-e). That this is a very odd thing to say ought not to escape any reader of the *Laches*, as Socrates subtly indicates. For he immediately turns to Laches for confirmation, saying, "[F]or there are presumably some courageous people, Laches, in such things too", to which Laches remarks "Very much so indeed, Socrates" (191e).

This passage has been something of a conundrum for many an interpreter of the *Laches*. Firstly, why does Socrates call these men "terribly clever"? Secondly, why does Socrates offer no examples as to this type of courage? Thirdly, what does Socrates mean when he says that such people are courageous "whether remaining *or* turning around in retreat"? Fourthly, are not "desires and pleasures" properly the concern of moderation? As Nichols comments, "Socrates' question points toward a definition that would include what is ordinarily called moderation"[103]. Moreover, Schmid says, "this conception appears to overextend the range of courage and blur the distinction between it and moderation or self-control", adding that this conception "seems to be very different not only from what the ancient Greeks but even from what many modern readers mean by courage"[104].

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the risks and pressures of office.

[102]Indeed, the historical Nicias (as presented in Thucydides and Plutarch) provides an interesting 'case study' with respect to questions concerning courage in politics (as well as sickness and warfare).

[103]Nichols, p. 274.

[104]See Schmid, p. 106-108.

According to Schmid, "this puzzle has a simple answer, one having to do with the different connotations of *andreia* and the modern conception of courage". He goes on to say:

> "For Laches, manliness, though fully expressed only in the actions of war, naturally includes a whole set of other physical and mental habits without which the citizen-soldier would be incapable of fighting bravely and would lack the willingness to do his duty, if only because of physical and emotional exhaustion. . . . Hence from the conventional ancient Greek point of view, there is nothing unusual about Laches' emphatic agreement that manliness does involve physical discipline in regard to pleasures and desires. The man who is effeminate, or pleasure- or money-loving, or self-indulgent or lazy, or the like simply cannot be a citizen-warrior; he would not have the will to persevere in the violent work of hoplite warfare."[105]

However, there is still cause for perplexity. Inasmuch as Socrates seems to be identifying ***manliness*** with complete self-control (which includes moderation), might he be pointing out that virtue is 'one'? Perhaps so, and yet this raises its own peculiar problems. For virtue may be one thing with several facets or manifestations, yet those facets or manifestations still seem themselves somehow distinct; hence their having particular names which do not seem simply interchangeable. So even if it is the case that one must be moderate if one is to be courageous (and vice-versa), this likely does not mean that one is being courageous when one (for example) refuses an opportunity to cheat on his wife, nor is one being moderate when (for example) one runs into a burning building to save someone's life[106]. Indeed, the relation of the whole of virtue to its parts,

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[105] Ibid., p.109.

[106] See further Socrates' account of moderation at *Republic* 430e-431b. Conspicuous by its absence (431bc) is any mention of ***fear***, though desires, pleasures, and pains are all mentioned. But see also Plato's *Laws*, where the Athenian Stranger gives a more

and the relation of the parts of virtue one to another, is a very complex matter. All of this leaves the passage something of a conundrum.

In any case, Laches confidently agrees that there are "some courageous people" in all of the things which Socrates mentioned. Summarizing the categories, Socrates says, "[S]ome possess courage in pleasures, some in pains, some in desires, and some in fears, and others, I think, possess cowardice in these same things", to which Laches replies "certainly". Socrates is now ready to ask Laches for a general definition of courage. However, he actually asks Laches for a definition not just of courage, but of cowardice also (as is clear from his asking "What in the world is *each* of these"). He tells Laches to "try again to say, *first* about courage" (191e); one ought to notice that nowhere in the dialogue does anyone venture to define cowardice. But might Plato's Socrates be pointing something out with this mention of "cowardice"? Might it be the case that one comes to understand the virtues through their respective vices? And yet, casting doubt on such assumptions, an attempt to define cowardice raises its own peculiar issues: is cowardice simply the absence of courage or something positive in itself? Related to this is the question as to whether the ability to recognize or define courage necessarily implies the ability to do likewise with cowardice.

Socrates goes on to ask Laches: "[W]hat is it that is the same in all these" (referring here to courage in pleasures, pains, desires and fears), further asking Laches if he understands the question yet. Here, Laches shows himself to be a slow learner, at least in this sort of activity,

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detailed account of how courage is manifested in fighting against desires and pleasures, especially emphasizing "flattery" (633c-634a; 635b-d).

replying, "Not altogether" (191e). In this respect, might Laches be indicative of a problem with *spirited* men generally, who are likely to be more apt at 'gymnastic' than music?

So, Socrates again asks the 'slow-learning' Laches what courage is, but this time providing an analogy to *speed*. Socrates says, "I mean it thus: just as if I were asking what speed is, which happens to exist for us in running and playing the cithera and speaking and learning and many other things, and we possess it – where it is worth speaking about – pretty much in the actions of hands, or legs or mouth and voice or thought... " (192a), upon which basis he defines speed as "the power of accomplishing many things in a short time, in respect of voice and running and all other things" (192b).

Examining the analogy, the first set of examples show actions in which speed is manifested, the second set of examples show the 'mediums' through which such actions are brought about. So, concerning courage, one needs to ask: what is the medium through which one manifests courage? To which one must answer, "the soul"[107]. Thus – and taking a cue from Socrates' asking Laches at 192b to define courage as he defined speed, i.e., as a "power" – one is to ask: *What "power" is it that "exists" in the soul, "and is therefore called courage"*?

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[107]It is doubtful whether one possesses courage simply in the 'spirited' part of the soul. For although courage may be spoken of as 'the virtue' of the spirited part of the soul (as it is in *Republic*), still, courage would seem to involve the entire psyche. Arguably, that this is so is 'verified' in the very next section of the dialogue with the failure of Laches' definition of courage as "steadfastness". For in and of itself, steadfastness would be a singularly *thumotic* act. Moreover, even at the simplest level of analysis, the 'mind' must discriminate between what things are to be endured.

Further analysis of the analogy is revealing with respect to courage in several ways, Firstly, people rarely (if ever) employ one faculty alone for the accomplishment of a given activity. For example, when running one employs not just one's legs but also one's arms and head, and in speaking one employs not just voice but also mouth and thought. So, considered analogously, the exercising of a virtue (in this case courage), would seem to require one to exercise the parts of one's soul in conjunction. Secondly, ***maintaining*** speed often requires ***endurance***, and thus the analogy would seem to suggest that courage will likewise involve endurance (or, steadfastness)[108].

Thirdly, people increase their ability to employ speed (and the requisite endurance) in such things as running, playing the cithera, speaking and learning, through training, or, ***practicing*** them; analogously, this suggests that one can increase one's courage through the very exercising of courage. Paradoxical as this may sound, one might recall here Aristotle's treatment of courage in his *Nichomachean Ethics*. For there he says, "[I]t is by habituating ourselves to make light of alarming situations and to face them that we become brave, and it is when we have become brave that we shall be most able to face an alarming situation."[109]

Lastly with respect to the analogies bearing on courage, as Schmid notes[110], "[Q]uickness is associated with boldness and decisiveness, the ability or inclination to seize an opportunity, to wade in and attack, if sometimes rashly, just as slowness may be associated negatively with

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[108]A point which requires no elaboration here inasmuch as it occurs throughout the dialogue and even forms a major theme of it.
[109]Aristotle, *NE*, 1104*b*1-4.
[110]Schmid, p.111-112.

overcaution or indecisiveness, the inclination always to wait to see things more clearly, before doing anything at all, or positively, with the absence of unthinking, undeliberate rashness."

But what of the definition itself? It is necessarily relative. For what constitutes the 'many' in "many things", or the 'short' in "a short time"? Thinking through Socrates' words, one realizes that his definition of speed is relative to the activity and some 'normal' rate of accomplishment. Clearly, the implication is that courage is to be both *understood* and appropriately *manifested* relative to the situation or activity. In this, Plato's Socrates seems to be anticipating Aristotle's 'doctrine of the mean' in which feelings such as "fear" or "confidence" and virtues such as courage are to be manifested "at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motive and in the right way"[111].

6(b)- *Laches' first attempt at a general definition of courage*

Laches gives his first definition of courage as a "certain steadfastness of the soul, if one must say about courage what it is by nature[112] in all cases" (192b-c). Despite the definition's ultimately being proven insufficient, as analysis of Socrates' three examples of courage in fleeing has already shown, Laches has rightly touched on something essential to courage in all of its manifestations: steadfastness.

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[111] Aristotle, *NE*, 1106b9-1107a1.

[112] It is interesting that Laches uses the words "by nature", for "steadfastness" is an effect of *thumos*, and *thumos* seems to be distributed to different persons in different degrees "by nature" (and this is also true of animals).

However, it seems that Laches implicitly recognizes that courage is not simply "steadfastness" *per se*, (i.e., his saying that it is a "a *certain* steadfastness of the *soul*"). Nor does this escape Socrates, for he tells Laches that he believes that not all steadfastness "appears to you to be courage", adding that he makes this "conjecture" based on the fact that "I pretty much know, Laches, that you hold courage to be among the altogether noble things". One suspects that Socrates' "conjecture" is not purely 'conjectural'; after all, Socrates has seen Laches' behavior at Delium (cf. 181b), and this experience has given him something of a 'window' into Laches' soul. In any case, Laches strongly affirms the assertion, saying, "Know well, then, that it is among the noblest" (192c).

Socrates now proceeds to remind Laches that he does not in fact hold all steadfastness to be courage. He begins by having Laches affirm that "steadfastness accompanied by prudence" is "noble and good" (192c). He then has Laches affirm that steadfastness accompanied by the "opposite", that is, by "imprudence", would be "harmful and evildoing". He goes on to have Laches affirm that such a thing which is "evildoing and harmful" would not be noble, and thus, it cannot be courage, "since it is not noble, and courage is a noble thing". At this point, Socrates tells Laches that, "Prudent steadfastness, therefore, would be courage, according to your argument". Laches, perhaps finding himself forced into a position which he does not feel quite right about, replies half-heartedly, "It seems so" (192d).

Several things need be noted here. Firstly, Socrates' "opposites" are incongruent, originally positing the opposite of noble to be harmful and the opposite of good to be evildoing, then immediately reversing their order in such a way as to make harmful the opposite of good, and

evildoing the opposite of noble. So, why might Socrates have initially made "noble" and "harmful" opposites and then immediately changed their order? Might it be because what is noble is so often harmful? This is not to say that what is noble might not be intrinsically good, it *might* well be. However, only the most niave idealist could hold that the effects of noble actions are *never* "harmful"[113]. Indeed, their being "harmful" may be a large part of their being "noble". Thus, when Socrates asked Laches whether he would "assert that such a thing which is evildoing and harmful is something noble", the latter might have done better to reply, "Evildoing, no. But harmful? Sometimes". However, he replies that to hold such things as noble "would certainly not be just" (192d)[114].

Socrates led Laches to (half-heartedly) affirm that "prudent steadfastness, therefore, would be courage, according to your argument" (192d) and here one must pause to consider this suggestion. For prudence is itself usually regarded as *one* of the virtues, though conspicuously never stated as such in this dialogue. So, understood,"prudent steadfastness" would seem to involve two virtues (presuming "steadfastness" is indeed courage), thus implying that this courage alone might not be unqualifiedly good. A further complication is

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[113]Take the example of a courageous soldier who, in dying nobly for his country, loses not only his future life, but the sight of his wife and children. Surely death, loss of loved ones, loss of limbs, and other such, are "harmful".

[114]Laches may well be right in a certain (unintended) way. That is, it might *not* be "just" to confuse the common understanding of nobility's relationship to harm as depicted in a people's *nomos*. Alcestis (who died nobly to save the life of her husband, actually taking his place in the execution), one might recall, was believed to have been honored by the gods (who sent her soul back up from Hades; see *Symposium* 179b-d). For it might be "just" for the law (i.e., when one considers its *telos*) to assert such things. See in this context Schmid, p. 118.

that this casts serious doubt on Socrates' claim at 192d that courage is unqualifiedly noble (i.e., the premise which facilitated Socrates' insertion of prudence). Another and perhaps stronger hypothesis is that the virtue of courage might ***require*** the virtue of prudence, again raising the question as to the relation of the virtues one to another and to the whole of 'Virtue'. Might prudence be the virtue around which the other virtues necessarily revolve (i.e., as a kind of axis)? Or -- looking ahead, and perhaps giving more to Nicias than one otherwise might want to -- might the other 'virtues' of a soul somehow be distinguishable manifestations of this single virtue, perhaps separately identifiable in theory though mingled in practice (as in 'prudent steadfastness)?

Socrates continues by asking Laches, ". . . [P]rudent in what respect? Or is it with respect to all things both great and small?". He then proceeds to offer Laches several examples requiring separate consideration. The first is of a man who is "steadfast in spending money prudently, knowing that having spent he will possess more", asking Laches if he would "call this one courageous?", to which Laches answers emphatically with the oath "By Zeus, not I!" (192e). Apparently, then, the 'psychic struggle' of such an endeavor is not considered worthy enough by Laches to constitute an act of courage inasmuch as it contains no ***risk***.

Socrates' second example is of the prudent doctor who is steadfast in not giving in to the pleas of his patients. Laches replies that this type of prudent steadfastness is not an example of courage either. Indeed, he says that the example is not courage "***in any way at all***" (193a). But is this true? Socrates specified that the begging person was the doctor's "***son*** or someone else" (192e), and so one might wonder if the act is

different when it concerns one's young son, rather than when it concerns, say, some man whom one does not know or personally care about. Indeed, the two situations seem very different with respect to the desire to give in and the difficulty of endurance. Moreover, the position of authority imposes a 'moral duty', both as knowledgeable doctor and as father, to do what is best despite the begging of the son (who may not know better). Seen in this light, this second example is an effective and ironic setup for the third.

In the third example Socrates asks: "How about a man in war who is steadfast and willing to fight, calculating prudently and knowing that others will come to his aid, that he will be fighting against fewer and inferior [men][115] than those he is with, and further that he holds stronger ground? Would you assert that this [man] who is steadfast with such prudence and preparation is more courageous than one in the opposite camp who is willing to remain standing his ground and to be steadfast" (193a). Notice that Socrates has moved from examples which asked *whether or not* something is courageous to examples which ask about *more and less* courage. Moreover, one ought to notice how much this resembles the very battle of Mantinea where Laches the general met with his death. In light of this, it is useful here to consider the battle of Mantinea.

The battle of Mantinea took place in the year 418, and was fought between the Argive coalition and the Spartan forces. Agis was head of the Spartan army sent to protect Tegea, and his forces out-numbered those of

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[115]Most likely, *after* the aid has come, though it is left ambiguous whether their numbers are superior or inferior before the aid.

the allies. It came to pass that Agis' best option was to try and force the allies "into a pitched battle as soon as possible"[116] before the Argive coalition received reinforcements and outnumbered his army; so he first attempted unsuccessfully to lure the allies by ravaging the Tegean plain. As Kagan recounts:

> "The members of the Argive coalition were drawn up in a strong defensive position on the lower slopes of Mount Alesion. They had chosen a place "steep and hard to get at [Thucydides, 5.65.I]," one from which they need move only if they wanted to. Furthermore, *sound strategy dictated that they refuse battle except on their own terms*. They were outnumbered by the Spartans, a situation that did not encourage an aggressive strategy. The burden of attack, moreover, belonged to Agis. It was he who needed a battle and a victory to relieve the pressure on Tegea and restore his own position in Sparta. If for any reason he withdrew once again without fighting, that would be a victory for the Argive coalition. Finally, we know that the Eleans had been asked to rejoin their allies and were on their way. We also know that reinforcements from Athens were coming; perhaps the generals of the confederacy knew it, too [5.75. 5. *The Eleans and Athenians arrived the day after the battle...*]. Once these reinforcements allowed them to outnumber the Spartans, the Argive generals could choose the proper moment to fight (they realized that the battle must occur before Sparta's northern allies could arrive). Until its reinforcements came, however, *the forces of the Argive coalition had every reason to remain in their strong position and avoid battle*, unless Agis was foolhardy enough to come to them"[117].

In short, one has here a match with the scenario of Socrates' example.

As is known, what happened at Mantinea was that the soldiers of the allied confederacy blamed and accused their generals of betraying them and letting the Spartans escape unharmed. This "bewildered" the generals, who "afterwards led the army down from the hill and went forward into the plain, where they camped with the intention of advancing

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[116] Kagan, p. 111.
[117] Ibid., p. 114 (italics added).

on the enemy"[118]. This was playing into the hands of the Spartans who had lured them in. The Spartans destroyed the coalition's army in the battle, killing the Athenian commander Laches, in what was one of the major events of the Pelopennesian War. In one scholar's judgement, "We must realize that an Allied victory at Mantinea would almost surely have put an end to the Peloponnesian War with a victory for Athens and her friends. Instead the Spartan victory restored Sparta's confidence and reputation"[119]. The allied coalition, with the Spartan-like Laches as the head of the Athenians, attempted to fight a Spartan-like battle on Spartan terms. Not a good idea.

As the example of Mantinea shows, the courage of a general, as opposed to the courage of a soldier, can sometimes require the courage (born of prudence) steadfastly to defy the men under command in the name of his superior knowledge, and to bear their scornful looks or accusations. Laches, it would seem, lacked these essential qualities that his position as general demanded of him at Mantinea.

Indeed, Laches' estimation that it is the "opposite camp" which has more courage might point to the rationale behind his actions at Mantinea inasmuch as he holds courage to be "among the noblest" things. Surely, if courage is measured *simply* by *risk* -- as the following examples will show Laches to believe -- then Laches is right; hence, he would likely seek that action which is most 'courageous'. However, if there is more to a courageous act than just the risk, more to a courageous act than just the deed itself; if, rather, the value of the deed follows from a rationally

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[118] *Thucydides*, 5.65.
[119] Kagan, p. 133.

determined goal, then Laches will need to reevaluate his ideas. Moreover, even were Laches' answer in the dialogue correct with respect to relative courage[120], the purpose of battle is not to display courage, but to attain victory. And this is something which a commander (such as Laches) more than anyone else should know and act upon. Like the doctor who knows best for his son, the commander must perform all of his actions with the good of the men he commands (and the nation he represents) on his mind.

Socrates suggest to Laches that the men in the opposite camp whom he holds to be more courageous display a steadfastness which is "more foolish, at any rate, than that of the other", to which Laches replies "What you say is true" (193b). However, here one might wonder whether being more foolish with respect to risk *necessarily* makes one more foolish simply[121]. For on occasion a commander's exercising of prudence for the sake of victory might well require the steadfastness to accept tremendous risk and loss of life.

Socrates next asks Laches if he believes that "one who is steadfast with knowledge of horsemanship in a cavalry battle is less courageous than the one without knowledge" (193b), to which Laches replies that in his "opinion", the one without knowledge of horsemanship is the more courageous. Once again, Socrates has left out a multitude of factors which would be needed for an adequate reply. On the surface, one can easily agree with Laches' opinion. Indeed, the one without knowledge

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[120]As *Socrates* depicts the situation, one might lean this way, though the example does not give some information that would be relevant for such a judgment.

[121]Reflecting on the Mantinea example, one sees that Agis and his army were not foolish at all in their steadfastness, but rather prudent.

would be entertaining far greater risk, experience more intense fear, have a much greater desire to run away, and so on. However, all of these things are essentially related to the fact that the one without knowledge runs greater risk. Thus, it might be superior rashness, not superior courage[122], which animates the one in this example[123].

Looking again at Socrates' example, one ought to notice how many factors he left out which would be relevant to any judgment of courage[124]. Indeed, trying to make a judgment as to the courage involved in every scenario, two factors constantly come into play: 1) The risk thought to be taken; and, 2) the nobility of the aim or task (i.e., the *telos*[125]). These two factors are necessarily inter-related. Otherwise, there would be no distinction between rashness and courage, and noble tasks undertaken without risk and accomplished with ease would qualify as courageous. Moreover, concerning the second factor, an understanding of the nobility of the risk would require some satisfactory understanding, not just of the noble, but of good and evil, thus allowing one to understand *why* the risk is worth taking[126].

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[122]Unless of course, courage *is* strictly relative to risk alone, in which case the most idiotic behavior (such as jumping off a twenty-storey building simply to see if you can survive) could qualify as great courage.

[123]One suspects, looking ahead, that this has not escaped Nicias' notice.

[124]For example, which side has more troops? better weapons? better position? and so on.

[125]For example, war simply for the sake of killing versus victory for the sake of higher culture. Indeed, the absence of these two essential factors are what make Socrates' 'battle examples' (and the 'well-diving' example which follows) impossible to answer adequately.

[126]More often than not, the opinions of one's 'cave' serve as a practical surrogate for this (i.e., culture, religion, and other such).

In the next example, Socrates asks the exact same question as in his last, though this time replacing " the art of horsemanship" with "the art of the sling or of the bow or some other art" (193b). Laches' response to these examples further confirm that he considers risk as the sole criterion with regards to courage (i.e., without any governance by reasoning about the purpose). Essentially, Laches "fails to recognize that prudence in every field has its source or principle in the unwavering apprehending and organizing of the technical deliberations and actions by the goal (*telos*) that governs within that field, the goal, for instance, of victory in the art of strategy, the goal of health in the art of medicine"[127] Or alternatively, as Nichols states[128], "[C]ourage as he [Laches] understands it has no necessary connection with reasonableness."

Socrates' last example confirms this still further, with Laches' saying that a well-diver (or anyone who takes a similar risk) who is not terribly clever in performing the task is more courageous than one who is. Again, Socrates leaves out a multitude of factors which would be required for any adequate judgment, and it is worth noting that Laches never points this out to him. For example, is the person without knowledge diving into the well on a dare, or is he diving in to save the life of a child who has fallen in? Socrates' ironic response to Laches' question of "what else would one say, Socrates", with, "Nothing, at least if that is how one thought", might lead one to suspect that he does not agree with Laches' judgment on this example (and perhaps on the others as well)[129]. Whatever the case,

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[127]Schmid, p.122-23.
[128]Nichols, p. 278.
[129]Concerning Socrates' opinion as to the examples, one might do well to consult Plato's *Protagoras* (349e-350c). For there Socrates, while questioning Protagoras as to

Laches replies that he does "indeed think so", and so Socrates is now ready to reveal the contradictions of Laches' position.

Socrates begins by pointing out to Laches that those he considered more courageous in the examples because they ran the greater "risk" were also more "imprudent" than those who ran the lesser risk with "art" (193c). Thus *prudent* steadfastness cannot be courage, leaving foolish steadfastness as the remaining option. However, as Socrates further points out to Laches: "Wasn't foolish daring, and steadfastness revealed to us in what preceded to be shameful and harmful?", to which Laches replies, "Certainly". And since courage was agreed to be "noble", whereas this "shameful" thing cannot be noble, Socrates gets Laches to agree that things must have gone wrong (193d).

Here one might wonder where "foolish daring" came from? They did not speak of this before. If the argument that Laches misunderstands essential features of prudence is correct, then might *prudent daring* be a candidate for a definition of courage? Moreover, it was not "foolish daring, *and steadfastness*" that was revealed to be objectionable, but only whatever steadfastness accompanies "foolish daring". Furthermore, foolish steadfastness was revealed earlier (193d) to be "harmful and evildoing", nowhere was the "shameful" mentioned[130].

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the courage and daringness of those *with and without* knowledge who dive into wells, fight on horseback, and fight in the light infantry, asks, "And isn't it clear . . . that men who are daring in this way [i.e., without knowledge] are not courageous but crazy?" (350c). Also, recall in this respect Socrates' tacitly denigrating 'fearlessness' without "adequate knowledge" at 186cd.

[130]Might it be the case that "foolish daring" *has* been "revealed to us in what preceded to be shameful and harmful" through Plato's clever reference to Mantinea?

So, why might Socrates' have switched "evildoing" with "shameful"? Firstly, recall that the earlier analysis of 192c-d showed "evildoing" to have a curious relationship to "noble". But now evildoing is replaced by shameful as the opposite of noble, and is this not actually more precise? The Greek word for "evildoing" here is "*blaberos*", which means "injurious", but with connotation of "injurious (or harmful) to another"[131], and as Schmid further points out, courage in war might well require that you "injure another", which does not make it ignoble or shameful. Thus, shameful is the better opposite to noble and Plato likely intends careful readers to see this.

But why else might Socrates have replaced "evildoing" with "shameful"? Might it be because Laches has deemed 'more courageous' behavior which is in fact shameful? Moreover, there is pedagogic utility in using shame with a man like Laches, one who is willing to fight zealously for his beliefs, who has an intense 'love of his own' and the highest regard for deeds and reputation. For shame, and the ridicule which so often accompanies it, is an integral part of the "means by which the community conveys and inculcates its standards of public respectability"[132], and is thus a very serious matter for a man like Laches[133]. By adding the aspect of shame, "Socrates' refutation of Laches goes to his innermost being, not his words alone but what he thinks life is for"[134].

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[131] Schmid, p.117-118.
[132] Nichols, p.272.
[133] As further evidenced by his actions at Mantinea.
[134] Schmid, p.125.

Upon agreeing that their speeches have not been noble, Socrates says, "Then you and I, Laches, according to your[135] speech, are presumably not harmoniously tuned to the Dorian", adding, "For in deed, it is likely, someone would declare that we partake in courage, but in speech, I think, he would not, if he now heard us discussing" (193d-e). Laches replies, "What you say is very true", and Socrates goes on to ask him: "Does it seem a noble thing for us to be in this condition?" to which Laches admits, "Not in any way at all" (193e)[136].

Socrates suggests to Laches that they obey the part of their speech which bid them to be "steadfast" saying, "So if you wish, let us too remain persistent and be steadfast in the search, in order that courage herself not ridicule us, because we do not seek her courageously, if perhaps steadfastness itself is often courage" (194a). Thus, *intellectual* courage has finally come to the forefront in the *Laches.* Moreover, this wonderfully suggestive metaphor of an *ideal*ized courage ridiculing two courageous men for their inability to capture her in speech (and by implication, in clear thought) has the perfect effect on Laches' manly soul[137]. Henceforth, then, an adequate interpretation of the *Laches* will require one to take note of the intellectual courage -- or lack of it -- displayed by the dialogue's participants.

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[135]And notice Socrates' emphasis that the preceding was not his, but rather, Laches' speech.

[136]One ought to notice how Socrates here emphasizes the "noble", mentioning it three times in this short section (193d-e). There shall be much to say on the topic of the noble (and its relation to the lessons learnt in this section) later in the inquiry.

[137]The Greek words "*pollakis aute he Karteresis estin andreia*" may also be translated to mean, "this very endurance [i.e., the endurance needed in inquiry] is courage"; see Schmid, p.128. However, a more accurate translation would be: "often this very endurance is courage".

Having incited Laches' manly pride through the wonderful metaphor of the laughing woman "courage" (actually "Manliness Herself"[138]), Socrates invites Laches to hunt her down and capture her. More to the immediate point, Socrates has brought Laches to the realization that he does not know how to state in speech what courage is. Laches reacts by saying, "I am ready, Socrates, not to desist. And yet I am unaccustomed to making such speeches. But a certain love of victory in regard to what has been said has taken hold of me, and I am truly irritated, if I am unable to say what I thus perceive in my mind. For in my opinion, at least, I do perceive in my mind what courage is, and I don't know how it just fled away from me, so that I didn't grasp it in a speech and say what it is" (194a-b). It seems, then, that Lysimachus' expectations were not altogether correct inasmuch as he believed that Laches was "capable of knowing and, when you knew, would *state* your opinions simply" (178b). In any case, Laches the warrior has been introduced to a new-battlefield and a new kind of victory, the victory of the *logos*-warrior in the battles to aquire knowledge. He has become "irritated" with himself and appears willing to embrace the terrible task of self-improvement.

Unfortunately, however, there is cause for concern. Firstly, it is a question whether Laches' *philonikia* (love of victory) is strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the love of honor which coexists in his soul. Secondly, Laches has not fully reached the state of self-conscious ignorance whereby one realizes that he knows nothing (or at least that one does not know what one thought one knew). For as Schmid points out,

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[138]The striking androgyny here, seemingly dictated by Greek grammar, ought not to go without notice or thought.

"Laches has discovered only that he 'can't say' what apparently he still believes he knows or has in mind. This is not the same, by any means, as learning that one 'doesn't know'; it is not yet the turning of the soul toward the light: it is at best the turning of the soul away from the shadows"[139].

A defense of Laches' position might be made by recalling the analysis of 190c which raised the question as to the ineffability of certain types of knowledge. Thus, Laches may very well "perceive" in his "mind" what courage is, and his inability to state it in speech would be due to no fault of his own, but rather would be intrinsic to the phenomena in question. However, even if this is the case, Laches' responses to Socrates' examples show that he likely does not fully perceive in his mind what courage is, and that he has a larger problem with respect to courage than merely his inability to state what is it is in speech.

At this point, Socrates calls Laches "friend" and reminds him that like "a good hunter" they "***must*** pursue and ***not give over***" in their search. Socrates' calling Laches a "friend" might point to some affinity in their natures, perhaps their spirited love of victory. Moreover, there is pedagogic utility in Socrates' making Laches feels his camaraderie and good-will. Socrates asks Laches, "So do we want to summon Nicias here too ***to the hunt*** if he is in some respect more resourceful than we?", to which Laches replies, "I do, why not?" (194b). Good question. For why might Laches not want Nicias to join their community of philosophic hunters? Recalling his "situation concerning speeches", Laches will not want to learn or listen to Nicias if he believes that Nicias is not a real man

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[139]Schmid, p.131.

who has proven himself in deed and who has a ***right*** to speak about courage. Moreover, he will further have to believe that Nicias has "complete frankness". However, it is possible that Laches, the lover of victory, will appreciate the intrinsic value of truth from whatever source.

6(c) - *Nicias' attempt to define courage*

Socrates tells Nicias that if he has some "power", he ought to come to the aid of his "friends", men who are "storm-tossed in speech", as if on a boat at sea unable to navigate through a storm of perplexity. He further asks Nicias to say what he considers courage to be, thus delivering[140] them from their "*aporia*". He closes by asking Nicias to do what Laches has explicitly admitted his inability to do. That is, to "securely establish in speech what you yourself perceive in your mind" (194c).

At this point one must ask: what is the "power" which has been lacking hitherto in this inquiry? Might it be the Phrygian mode[141] which will temper and govern in place of the Dorian mode which has hitherto governed? Might Nicias' power be 'music' as opposed to Laches' 'gymnastic'? Or perhaps Nicias' power is his hearing, and thus he will complement Laches' seeing? (And note, neither of these options need be mutually exclusive.) Whatever the case, Nicias' opening speech reveals several respects in which he may contribute to the inquiry. He expresses

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[140] As Munro notes, the word *ekluo* (translated as "deliver") is literally "set free".
[141] See *Republic*, 399a-b.

his belief that Socrates has not given a 'noble definition of courage" because he has not been "using" a "noble thing" which Nicias has earlier "heard" him speak of. When Socrates inquires into "what sort of thing" he is talking about, Nicias replies that he has "often heard" Socrates say that "each of us is good in those things with respect to which he is wise and bad in those with respect to which he is unlearned" (194d). At this point Socrates responds with his only oath of the dialogue, exclaiming, "What you say, Nicias, is true indeed, by Zeus!"[142].

Several preliminary remarks need to be made. Firstly, Nicias' emphasizing the "noble" seems to show an appreciation for its relationship to courage, as well as his own general refinement. Secondly, Nicias has immediately emphasized "what he has heard", reminding one that one can hear a "noble thing" without understanding why it is noble (or even recognize that it is). All of which raises a third point: why Socrates pretends to have forgotten this rule of his which he has "often" said. For Socrates is most likely dissembling; one rarely forgets something that one truly understands, much less a general principle of such sweeping importance. Thus, assuming that Socrates understands what he has often said, one has to wonder if Nicias has understood what he claims to have often heard.

Nicias, apparently taking Socrates' exclamation to be genuine, says, "So then, if the courageous man is good, clearly he is wise". Socrates then turns to Laches and asks "Did you hear, Laches?" Recalling the

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[142]Is Socrates swearing that the statement is true, or that he has indeed often said it? Moreover, there might be an intended slight to Laches' in Nicias' point about being bad in the things of which one is "unlearned", in which case Socrates' agreement would then be echoing the slight.

dialogue's central passage, this likely is part of Socrates 'doctoring' of Laches, who, trusting his eyes over his ears, must be *made to hear*. But thus far this 'doctoring' is not going too well, for Laches replies that he does hear Nicias, but that he does "not particularly understand what he is saying". Socrates replies that he does understand Nicias and that Nicias "seems [to him] to be saying that courage is a certain wisdom" (194d). Laches replies, "Wisdom! Of what sort Socrates"[143]. Socrates then asks, "Are you then asking him this?", to which Laches replies, "I am" (194e).

Notice about this exchange what Socrates seems to notice. That is, rather than direct his questions and comments towards Nicias, Laches is directing them towards Socrates. This is a strong indication that the earlier suspicion was correct, i.e., Laches is pained by Nicias because he believes the latter to have no right to speak on courage.

At any rate, Socrates tells Nicias to tell Laches, "what kind of wisdom courage would be, according to your account" (194e). For "presumably", Socrates adds, it would not be wisdom of something as insignificant as "the art of the aulos" or the "art of the cithera"[144]. To both these questions Nicias replies confidently "Not at all", and, "Indeed not". Socrates then asks Nicias, "But then what, or of what, is this knowledge?", and Laches re-enters the conversation, telling Socrates that he is "questioning him very correctly indeed", adding, "And let him say what he asserts it is" (194e) -- as if rebuking Nicias for his imprecision as to just what this wisdom of his is.

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[143] As Nichols notes: "Literally, Laches asks, 'what sort of wisdom?' The phrase, frequent in comedy, also has the force of an exclamation of disbelief -- perhaps 'Wisdom, my foot!'" See Nichols, p. 259.

[144] Munro makes a nice point here, asking whether Socrates might be suggesting that the wisdom that makes one good is "akin to the wisdom that makes one musical" (p.81).

Nicias takes up Laches' challenge by giving his definition of courage. He confidently turns to Laches, saying "This, Laches, is what I say it is: the knowledge of terrible and of confidence inspiring things, both in war and in all other things" (195a). Laches replies, again not to Nicias but to Socrates, exclaiming that what Nicias says is "strange"; Socrates asks Laches why he says this. Laches, apparently in disbelief that Socrates would even ask this question (supposing it to be obvious to anyone that Nicias' words are "strange"), replies, "To what? Wisdom is doubtless distinct from courage". One cannot be sure whether Socrates shares Laches' judgment, and this ambiguity is maintained by Socrates' reply: "Nicias does not say so". Laches, however, will not entertain the idea that Nicias is saying anything true or important, answering, "Indeed not, by Zeus, and that is why he is talking rubbish!". At this point Socrates seeks to temper Laches with the words, "Then let us teach him, let us not revile him" (195a). It seems, then, that Socrates holds a very different 'situation concerning speeches' than Laches does. Whatever the case, as Schmid puts it, "Thanks to Laches, the mood of the conversation has clearly reverted back to the mode of a contest"[145].

Nicias, likely thankful to Socrates for his aid in dealing with Laches, explains what he believes to be the cause of the latter's bad attitude: Laches desires that Nicias be revealed to be talking nonsense because he himself was just revealed to be speaking nonsense. Now, although Nicias has likely 'hit the nail on the head' as to Laches' intentions, his judgment that Laches spoke "nonsense" is not altogether correct. Indeed, Socrates tacitly confirmed that they should keep the aspect of 'steadfastness' which

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[145]Schmid, p. 133.

Laches introduced. As shall subsequently be seen, Nicias' ignoring of this aspect of steadfastness points to a major flaw in his understanding of courage.

Laches, stung by Nicias' insult, finally decides to engage Nicias head-on and "prove" that the latter speaks nonsense. His first attack on Nicias is with the question: "[I]n the case of illnesses, do not doctors know the terrible things? Or in your opinion do courageous [men] know? Or do you call doctors courageous?" (195b). Nicias, unfazed, replies "Not in any way at all". So farmers, Laches begins again, "doubtless know the things that are terrible in farming, and all the other craftsmen know the things that are terrible and confidence inspiring in their own arts. But they are none the more courageous for it" (195b-c). Here Socrates interjects, asking Nicias what he thinks Laches is saying, since in his opinion, "He does seem to be saying something". One sees that Nicias left himself wide open for this attack, since his definition was not only vague, (i.e., what exactly are these terrible and confidence inspiring things and to what do they pertain?), but it spoke of "war *and* in all other things".

But Nicias is still unfazed by Laches, saying that the latter is "indeed saying something, but not something true" (195c). This, he explains, is on account of Laches' believing that doctors know more about the sick than what is healthy or sickly when in fact this is the limit of their knowledge pertaining to the sick. Nicias now questions Laches, asking him if he believes that doctors know "whether it is terrible [*deinos*] for someone to be healthy rather than to be sick", further asking him whether or not he believes that it is "better for many to die?" For the first time in their conversation, Laches agrees with something Nicias says, answering

that he does think that sometimes it is better to die than to live[146]. That conceded, Nicias now has Laches where he wants him, asking him if he thinks that "the same things are terrible for those for whom it is profitable to die as for those for whom it is profitable to live?", to which Laches replies, "No, I don't." At this point, Nicias asks Laches if he would give such knowledge to anyone other than the man whom he calls courageous, i.e., "the knower of terrible and not terrible things" (195d). Socrates, perhaps sympathetic towards the possibilities in Nicias' argument, turns to Laches and asks, "Do you fully perceive in your mind, Laches, what he is saying?"

Here one ought to consider a few points. Firstly, Nicias' example of knowing whether it is better to live or die might mean nothing other than that it is better to die than to go on living in pain -- as opposed to, say, the idea that it is better for one with an incorrigibly unjust soul to die than to go on living to his detriment[147]. Secondly, and related, Nicias initially speaks of it being "better" for one to die than to live but then immediately speaks of it being "profitable" for one to do so. Intuitively, the former seems plausible though the latter seems patently absurd inasmuch as it would seem impossible for one to procure any *gain* in death. However, Nicias' point is salvageable in light of a belief in an after-life entailing rewards and punishments. In light of the piety of the historical Nicias, which Socrates will later allude to, this latter possibility may be Nicias' intended meaning. Thirdly, Nicias has subtly changed his definition at

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[146]Laches might have in mind that it is better to die with honor than to live in disgrace, or other such noble thoughts --which is not necessarily what Nicias has in mind.
[147]An idea expressed in Plato's *Gorgias*. Cf. *Republic*, 410a.

195d, replacing "confidence-inspiring" (195a) with "not terrible". Might this suggest a curious passivity in Nicias' soul?

But what is most questionable is this: how could it possibly be more "terrible" to be healthy rather than sick when the entire natural order testifies to the unqualified superiority of health over sickness? Intuitively, this too seems absurd. And yet, though health is always unqualifiedly better than sickness with respect to the body, this may not *always* be true regarding the soul. In *Republic*, Socrates speaks of a certain Theages who was saved for philosophy on account of his sickness (496b-c). Earlier in this dialogue, Socrates said that courage could be manifested in sickness (191d), and the analogy to speed suggested that it is by practicing courage that one can become more courageous. Thus, inasmuch as sickness can afford the opportunity to bear pain and fear with steadfastness, it may in fact be beneficial for one's soul to *occasionally* suffer from it[148]. Lastly, Socrates asks Laches if he "fully" perceives in his mind what Nicias is saying, suggesting that there might be two issues at work: 1) how Nicias wants to be understood; and 2) how Nicias' really ought to be understood.

In any case, Laches replies confidently that he does understand what Nicias is saying: "[H]e is calling diviners courageous" (195e). He says this because he cannot imagine that anyone else would know "whether it is better for someone to live or to die". And so he asks Nicias if he himself is a diviner, "or neither a diviner nor courageous?". Nicias,

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[148]Indeed, as modern medicine attempts to eliminate all sickness, a pertinent and especially timely question is whether this achievement would truly be in the benefit of the species? For a radical perspective on the question of sickness, see Rousseau, *Emile*, Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Allan Bloom, USA: Basic Books, p. 42, 47, 54-55.

surprised by Laches' conclusion[149], asks Laches if he believes that it is the diviner who knows "the terrible and the confidence inspiring things", to which Laches replies, "I do, for to whom else?" (195e). Nicias assures him that he is *not* speaking at all about diviners, as a diviner knows only the "signs" of what will be in the future but does not know better "than anyone else at all" whether it is better "to experience or not to experience" these things (196a). Indeed, Nicias argues that loss of property can be good or bad and that victory in war can be bad and defeat good. Here one might wonder: how can it be terrible to achieve victory in war? Might Nicias' courageous man believe it better to lose an unjust war than to win it[150]? This would certainly take a special courage.

It is helpful in this context to try and 'map out' what Nicias has hitherto said. Thus far he has held that: 1) neither the doctor nor the farmer is the courageous man he has in mind; 2) it might be better for someone to be sick as opposed to healthy (and vice versa), or to die rather than to live (and vice-versa), and his courageous man has this knowledge; 3) death, illness, loss of property, victory in war or defeat in war can all be either better to suffer or better not to suffer; and, 4) the diviner is *not* the courageous man of whom he is speaking. Now, the first thing to notice is that Nicias' position is somewhat unique inasmuch as these are not opinions people commonly hold. For most people would simply consider it always better to live than to die, to win a war than to lose a war, to be healthy rather than to be sick, and *never* to lose ones' property[151]. Thus,

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[149]And this is especially ironic given Nicias' behavior in Sicily.

[150]There may be other ways in which it is arguably better to lose a war than to win one (for example, a wise man in an inferior culture may believe it beneficial for his people to be conquered by and assimilated into a superior one).

[151]Recalling Machiavelli's wisely saying that a Prince "above all . . . must abstain from

there might be a sense in which Nicias has 'risen' above 'the many' (and he himself explicitly claims to have done so in the section which follows). Or, he may simply be eristical, using sophistry to avoid conceding his ignorance.

Returning to the action of the dialogue, Laches clearly believes the latter, insisting that he does not understand what Nicias is trying to say, for he cannot imagine what kind of being would have the knowledge which Nicias speaks of, unless he is talking about "some god". He accuses Nicias of being "unwilling nobly to agree that he is talking nonsense" and of twisting and turning in order to conceal his "perplexity". He says that he and Socrates could have done the same thing if they had wanted to, but that, seeing as how they are not "in a law court", why would anyone "adorn himself in vain with empty speeches" in a conversation which claims to aim at discovery of the truth (196a-b)? Socrates agrees with Laches that there would be no need for such behavior[152], but advises Laches to wait and see if his estimation of Nicias' behavior is true or not, saying, "but let us see if Nicias doesn't think he is saying something and not saying these things for the sake of a speech". Indeed, he says that if this or something like this is the case, then, "We shall accede to it, ***and if not, we shall teach him***". Laches accedes to this, but only conditionally, saying, "If you wish to inquire, Socrates, you inquire then. I have perhaps inquired sufficiently" (196c).

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the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony" (*The Prince*, chapter 17). Moreover, concerning this topic of losing one's property, one ought to wonder if Nicias' son Niceratus (whose property the state later attempted to take away) would agree that this could be good. There is an irony here which Plato delightfully exploits.

[152]Perhaps a subtle criticism of Laches' (court-like) accusatory behavior thus far.

Note several things about this exchange. Firstly, Laches' comment that there would be the some reason "in a law court" for one to "adorn [oneself] in vain with empty speeches", betrays a facet of his soul which is worth pondering[153]. Indeed, Socrates himself criticizes exactly this type of behavior in *Apology* (38d-e). Though one ought not to make too much of this point, still, it is worth recalling that Aristophanes' *Wasps* portrays Laches being charged for malfeasance.

Secondly, and more importantly, notice Laches' doing what Socrates insisted that they must not do. That is, his "giving over",and this despite never really giving Nicias an opportunity to elaborate his position (cf. 184b). Thus, Laches' 'giving over' might show a lack of steadfastness in the argument. However, as shall be seen shortly, Laches' *thumatic* love of honor, compounded with his intense 'love of his own', will prove too strong for him to hold back from confronting Nicias again.

Socrates, not wishing to let Laches retire completely from the conversation, tells the latter that he will inquire further into Nicias' position, though "the inquiry will be a common one on behalf of me and you" (196c). Laches, really wanting to see Nicias be revealed for what he believes he is, adamantly agrees with Socrates' proposal. Socrates, stressing again that he is "sharing the argument in common" (196d) with Laches, restates Nicias' definition and asks him if he agrees that this was his assertion, which the latter affirms. One ought to notice here that Socrates uses the original definition which said "confidence inspiring things" (195a) and not Nicias' restatement of the definition which replaced this with "not terrible things" (195d). Socrates further asks

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[153]It seems also to point to the overall deterioration of Athenian 'culture'.

Nicias if it his position that not every man has this knowledge, not even doctors and diviners[154], unless they have "acquired this very knowledge in addition" (196d), to which Nicias replies "Yes." Socrates deduces from this that according to Nicias "not every pig would know it or be courageous", an idiomatic expression implying that the thing is not so easy to know that the common lot of people would know it, and Nicias agrees. Socrates then adds a curious twist, suggesting that Nicias must hold that no animal, not even the "Crommyonian Sow", would be courageous, since animals could not know things "that few human beings know because of their being hard to know" (196e). Laches, unable now to hold himself back, bursts back into the conversation with an oath, saying delightedly, "By the gods, what you say is good, Socrates! And answer this truly Nicias: do you assert that these wild animals, which we all agree are courageous, are wiser than we, or contradicting us all do you dare not to call them courageous either". Nicias, taking up Laches' dare, says that he considers "either wild animals or anything else that does not fear terrible things on account of ignorance not courageous but fearless and stupid" (197a). He goes on to make a nice distinction between being "fearless" and being courageous, adding that "few people have a share in courage and forethought, whereas very many - among men and women and children and wild animals - have a share in boldness and daring and fearlessness with lack of forethought" (197b). Nicias thus differentiates himself from "the many", claiming that what they call courageous, he calls "bold", while he calls courageous the "prudent things" about which

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[154]Why does Socrates use these two examples and neglect farming? Might it be because Nicias' paramount concern is the survival of his body through knowledge of the future?

he has spoken. At this point, Laches again accuses Nicias of merely 'adorning himself' "in speech"[155], further accusing him of endeavoring to "deprive those whom all agree to be courageous of this honor" (197c).

Because this section is one of the densest and most important of the entire dialogue, it requires careful attention. Firstly, notice not only how zealously Laches holds the opinion that animals have courage (and this after his conversation with Socrates which emphasized that *mind* must have something to do with courage), but also how adamantly he identifies with common opinion, while presuming that Socrates does so as well (e.g., people "*all* agree" that certain animals "are courageous", asking Nicias if he is going to contradict "us all" and say that they are not). Then, when Nicias explicitly identifies Laches' opinion with that of 'the many' (i.e., "these things that you and the many call courageous") and says that his own opinion differs, Laches takes no offence from this, but rather, accuses Nicias of shamelessly endeavoring "to deprive those whom *all agree* to be courageous of this honor". Thus it would seem that Plato has made his Laches something of a representative of 'the many,' insofar as intellectual matters are concerned. This is also the conclusion of Schmid with regards to this passage, who says, "Laches is identified here with the many, or with the city in the mode of common opinion and common values"[156]. Notice also in this respect how Laches immediately feels that Nicias and his 'wisdom' pose a threat to what he cherishes most: the honor which is of necessity distributed by 'the many' in

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[155] An accusation that is not entirely fair. For, arguably, Nicias' position here is quite sensible, though unconventional. Might Laches believe that people who "dare" to speak unconventional ideas 'adorn themselves' in speech?

[156] Schmid, p.148.

accordance with their norms and modes of thinking. Moreover, his believing Socrates to share his opinion is interesting inasmuch as were he to learn the truth about the philosopher Socrates' opinions, he would almost surely feel this same threat[157]. One last thing worth mentioning is how Laches first and foremost considers courage as deserving of "honor", rather than regarding it as a personal victory for oneself over one's own baser instincts.

But what of the opinion itself that animals can have courage? Here one might consult Aristotle, who says:

> "Courageous people act for a fine [noble] motive, and their spirit is an accessory; but beasts act under the influence of pain: it is because they have been injured or frightened; this is shown by the that in a forest (or marsh) they do not attack [i.e., because the have a chance to escape]. Thus it does not mean that beasts are courageous simply because, impelled by pain and anger, they rush into danger, blind to the risks they run; if this were so, even donkeys would be brave when they are hungry, because they refuse to stop grazing even if you beat them. (Adulterers, too, are led on by their lust to do many reckless things.) The quasi-courage that is due to spirit seems to be the most natural, and if it includes deliberate choice and purpose it is considered to be courage."[158]

One might further recall *Republic* in this context, for there Socrates explicitly and strongly denies that "beasts" have courage of the kind they attributed to the warriors of their 'city in logos', and agrees with Glaukon that what animals have is to be called "something other than courage" (430b-c; cf. 375a). So, whether animals have 'a kind of courage' or "quasi-courage", or whether they have (strictly speaking) no courage at all, in either case, what they have would seem to be different from the

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[157] And there are strong hints here to the situation portrayed in the *Apology* as to the tension between the philosopher and the city. See here Schmid, p.150.

[158] Aristotle, *NE*, 1116b30-1117a4.

fully human virtue of courage, of which Socrates claims unequivocally to be "a noble thing" (192d).

Another thing to note in this section is Socrates' mention of the "Crommyonian Sow", that "fierce beast slain by Theseus, the legendary national hero of Athens"[159]. As Plutarch tells the story: "The Crommyonian Sow, which they called Phaea, was a savage and formidable beast, by no means an enemy to be despised. Theseus killed her, going out of his way on purpose to meet and engage her, so that he might not seem to perform all his great exploits out of mere necessity; being also of the opinion that it was the part of a brave man to chastise villainous and wicked men when attacked by them, but also to seek out and overcome the more noble wild beasts"[160].

Another thing worthy of special attention in this section is Socrates' first naming three very spirited and aggressive animals: 1) lion, 2) leopard, 3) wild boar, and then naming four more animals (actually repeating the lion example): 1) the lion, 2) deer, 3) bull, and 4) monkey. He says that according to Nicias' definition these are "of necessity", "by nature alike as regards courage". Now, though these animals might be

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[159]Nichols, n. 34, p.262.

[160]Plutarch, p.7. What is one to make of this example? Several possibilities come to mind. Firstly, might the fact that Crommyonian Sow was "by no means an enemy to be despised" suggest that the greater the enemy to be defeated, the greater the man? That is, that how truly great men choose their enemies is indicative of their greatness? Secondly, might the example show how true courage must go beyond "mere necessity", acting not only in defense but in active *offense*? Or thirdly, might the example simply serve as something to ponder and question? That is, is one to ask whether this cherished and revered story is an example of courage? Perhaps it was foolish daring on Theseus' part (notice that he is explicitly concerned with how he is seen in the eyes of others)? Or perhaps a great example of courage; one which points to a magnanimous act by a magnanimous man? In any case, the story actually points to the courage of Theseus, not of the pig.

alike as regards courage in the strictest sense (i.e., none of them have it if it requires *mind* or reason), they are *not* simply "by nature alike". For nature has given them different levels of strength, and more importantly, *thumos*. Notice that the sequence is a very spirited and predatorial animal, (the lion), followed by a less spirited and proverbially cowardly animal on which it preys (the deer), followed by an animal, less aggressive in offense than the lion but ferocious in defense (the bull), followed by an animal prone to "simply flee"[161] (the monkey). *Thumos*, that thing given out in differing degrees by nature[162] and which is the seat of steadfastness, goes completely unrecognized by Nicias -- this is in keeping with his falsely accusing Laches earlier of speaking "nonsense" when in fact he did make the excellent and necessary point of the importance of steadfastness for courage.

Concerning Nicias' closing remarks, notice how after saying that many "have a share in boldness and daring and fearlessness with lack of *forethought*", he says that he calls "courageous the *prudent* things about which I am talking". This would seem to imply that Nicias equates "prudence" with "forethought". If so, Nicias betrays a misunderstanding of prudence that might be quite revealing about him. For the equation of these two things, compounded with the fact that Nicias' courageous man emphasizes thought with precious little reference to deeds, presents a fascinating picture: a man who thinks and waits and thinks and waits and thinks and waits -- the historical Nicias. Moreover, such emphasis on forethought is interesting inasmuch as it points to a pious man's possible

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[161] Schmid, p. 147.
[162] See *Republic*, 411b.

reliance on diviners as a practical surrogate for his own lack of foreknowledge -- again, as Thucydides relates concerning Nicias' behavior leading to the Syracusan disaster.

Notice further how Nicias speaks of "wild animals or anything else", calling them "fearless and stupid" because they "do not fear terrible things on account of ignorance", while neglecting to say that they also lack the appropriate souls to know what is confidence inspiring. He seems here to treat courage as knowing what fearful things to avoid while neglecting the aspect of knowing what goods ought to be pursued -- possibly requiring courage to do so. He betrays a passive attitude towards courage which is indicative of so much that he has said in the dialogue and of so much that Thucydides and Plutarch say of the historical person.

Lastly, Nicias introduces three characterizations of courage: 1) prudent boldness; 2) prudent daring; and, 3) prudent fearlessness[163]. He says he considers these things to be courage, while considering as "bold" such qualities in the absence of 'prudential forethought' (a phrase which would seem to be redundant in Nicias' mindset). Now, either Nicias has just contradicted himself by failing to see a connection between boldness and courage immediately after having characterized courage as 'prudent boldness', or he means something more subtle, namely, that the courageous man is bold, but the 'bold man' is not always courageous[164].

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[163]The central of these (prudent daring) is the very same thing which Socrates implicitly introduced at 193d under the guise of an already spoken of option.

[164]See Plato's *Protagoras* (351a), where the sophist Protagoras makes this same distinction between courage and daring. See also Plato's *Meno*, where Socrates says, "[C]ourage, if it is courage apart from prudence, is but a kind of boldness: when a human is bold without sense, he is harmed" (88b).

Returning to the action of the dialogue, Nicias attempts to pacify the angry Laches by denying that he endeavors to deprive everyone of the honor of courage, even saying that he thinks that Lamachus and Laches "are wise...if indeed you two are courageous - and numerous other Athenians as well" (197c). This not so subtle qualifier ("if") does not escape Laches, who says that he shall not retort, though he has "things to say", lest he be accused of truly being from his deme (i.e., Aexone), where the people have a bad reputation for being abusive in speech[165]. But more importantly, the reference to the general Lamachus reminds one of the Sicilian Expedition and its original three commanders: Lamachus, Nicias, and Alcibiades (that the last is not mentioned in the context of naming 'courageous Athenians' makes him especially conspicuous). Plato gives an opportunity here to juxtapose three different men in light of the expedition which failed miserably when only one was left in charge: Nicias.

Beginning with Lamachus, he favored an aggressive war policy. His portrayal in Thucydides actually shows him to be somewhat like the Laches portrayed in this dialogue (i.e., very spirited and aggressive). In fact, Lamachus' attitude towards the expedition was arguably the best one of the three. For he held that "they ought to sail straight to Syracuse and fight their battle under the city walls as quickly as possible" because "this would be where the enemy was most frightened of them". If given time, he believed, the enemies "spirits" would "revive" and they will be "less impressed than they would have been". But to attack quickly and in full

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[165]See Nichols, n. 36.

numbers "while the enemy were still terrified at the thought of it, would give Athens the best chance of victory and would most seriously affect the morale of the Syracusans", making them immediately "apprehensive of all the sufferings in store for them, and most of all terrified of having to risk battle immediately". Success was even more likely, he believed, because many Syracusans who did not believe "that the Athenians were coming" would be "cut off outside the city in the country districts" and so there would be "no shortage of money"[166]. Now, the reason one can know that this was such good advice is because Thucydides allows the reader to see the debates at Syracuse just preceding the Athenian arrival. Indeed, Thucydides himself, (and later the Syracusan speakers Hermocrates and Athenagoras), confirms Lamachus' claim that, regarding the entire expedition, "for a long time none of it was believed"[167]. Moreover, Lamachus' opinion on the 'psychology of a quick attack' is shared by the Syracusan speaker Hermocrates, who argues that "the people who attack first... are the ones who are most feared". Thus he counseled that the Syracusans should prepare themselves and attack first, arguing that if the Athenians "were to see us acting with daring that they do not anticipate, they would be more frightened by the unexpectedness of the thing than they would be by the power which we really have. It is this daring action, therefore, which I am most anxious that you should take". Moreover, Hermocrates counsels the Syracusans to prepare "in a spirit of confidence", while himself taking confidence from the information which he has received about Nicias. For he says in his speech that, "[A]ccording

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166 *Thucydides*, VI. 49.
167 Ibid. VI. 32.

to my information, their most experienced general has no wish to be in command and would be glad to return"[168].

Of course, Hermocrates' judgment of Nicias was wholly right. Unlike Lamachus' daring attitude, Nicias counseled that the force should sail not to Syracuse but to Selinus, get either money or sixty ships from the Egestaeans, and either force or negotiate a settlement between Egesta and Selinus. Then, he counseled, the expeditionary force should "sail along the coast past the other cities, making a demonstration of the power of Athens and, after showing how ready she was to come to the help of her friends and allies, should sail back home again"[169], a plan which Alcibiades considered would be a "disgrace"[170].

Alcibiades' plan was less aggressive than Lamachus' but much more so than Nicias'. He essentially counseled that they should send heralds out to encourage revolt against Syracuse and win allies. After setting up port in Messina, and after knowing who their allies are, they could then attack Syracuse and Selinus as it suited their interests (see VI.48). The three generals decided on precisely this plan, with Alcibiades subsequently being called back to Athens on a charge of impiety. Lamachus was eventually killed in battle, leaving Nicias in charge of the expedition which later ended in such a tragic disaster.

These recollections show through juxtaposition just how flawed Nicias' views were, and how those very flaws of Nicias' may conform to precisely the person careful analysis shows to be portrayed in the *Laches*.

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[168] Ibid. VI. 34.
[169] Ibid. VI. 47.
[170] Ibid. VI. 48.

However, thus far in the dialogue these can only be suspicions, and Nicias will soon have a chance to elaborate his position further with Socrates.

Socrates tells Laches not to respond to Nicias' ambiguous remark, and it is interesting to wonder just what Laches might have had in mind as a response to Nicias' insinuation that he and Lamachus are not courageous. The most obvious thing, in light of Laches' conduct towards Nicias thus far, and this in light of what was said earlier about his attitude towards certain speakers, is that Laches likely wanted to tell Nicias that it is *he* who is not courageous and who actually has no right even to talk about something which he has never displayed (let alone to question those who have). But whatever the case, Socrates points out to Laches that he has not noticed that Nicias "has received this wisdom from our comrade Damon" who "keeps company a good deal with Prodicus, who of the sophists seems to distinguish such terms[171] in the finest manner" (197d). Socrates is referring here to Nicias' distinction between boldness and courage, and one is left with the suspicion that Nicias has gotten his noble sounding definition of courage (as "the knowledge of terrible and confidence inspiring things") from these same sources. Whatever the case, Socrates has here pointed out something very important: Nicias, if not a sophist himself, keeps company with sophists. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, for one can surmise that Socrates has also kept company with Prodicus, and this despite his earlier remark that he cannot afford to do so (186c). So it seems that Socrates was not then being

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[171] Alternatively translated as "names".

completely frank inasmuch as he may somehow consort with sophists without paying them[172]. Moreover, as Nichols notes, Socrates often praises Prodicus, though, "sometimes, to be sure, Socrates seems ironical in his praise of Prodicus"[173]. Furthermore, Damon is treated respectfully in *Republic*, especially with regards to understanding the effect of music on the soul[174]. Thus, it is likely not so important that one recognize the *source* of what Nicias says as it is that one question whether Nicias understands what he has heard or simply regurgitates speeches without fully knowing what he says. This makes Socrates' question at the start of Nicias' entrance into the conversation all the more poignant: "deliver us from perplexity and securely[175] establish in speech what ***you yourself*** perceive in your mind" (194c).

The lines immediately following lend support to this. Laches mocks the sophists, saying that "it is indeed fitting" that they "contrive such subtleties", but a real man, especially one who is a head of the city's government, should take no part in such things. But Socrates' response is fascinating: "Yet it is surely fitting, blessed [man], for him who is the leader of the greatest things to partake in the greatest prudence" (197e). Notice first how Socrates, unlike Nicias who apparently equates it with forethought, considers "prudence" to be concerned with distinguishing

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[172]Cf. *Charmides*, 163d.

[173]Nichols, n. 37, p.263.

[174]See *Republic*, 400b, and 424c, of which Socrates says that he is "persuaded". Moreover, this is especially important here since "*harmonia*" (188d) and its relationship to the soul is an explicit theme in the *Laches*. Furthermore, Socrates himself is the one who introduced Damon to Nicias as music teacher for his son (180d).

[175]In light of the historical Nicias' obsession with security, this is likely a pun on Plato's part.

"names"[176]. Recall that in the *Seventh Letter*, Plato considers "names" to be "the first element in the knowledge of something"[177]. That is, the starting point of philosophic inquiry. Is Socrates here suggesting that those who partake in the greatest things (the affairs of the city, i.e., *politics*) should partake in the pursuit of knowledge, or, *philosophizing* (i.e., the "greatest prudence")? This is as close as Socrates comes in the *Laches* to endorsing explicitly the activity of political philosophy.

Socrates goes on to say, "Nicias in my opinion is worthy of examination, as to what in the world he looks to when he assigns this name, courage" (197e), at which point Laches, for the second time in the dialogue "gives over" (194b), bluntly proposing, "Well then, examine him yourself, Socrates". Socrates does not back down from this, telling Laches that he is indeed "going to do this", further warning him, "Do not think, however, that I am letting you go from partnership in the argument, but turn your mind to it and join in examining what is said" (198a). Laches, perhaps questioning by his tone the utility of this, replies, "Let it be so, if it seems that it must", to which Socrates replies, "It does seem so". One ought to notice here that for some reason Socrates is especially concerned that he keep Laches in the conversation as a *partner*. Presumably then, though there might be other reasons, Socrates believes there is something Laches can beneficially learn from the experience[178]. In any case, Socrates is about to start the conversation with Nicias again "*ex arches*" (198a).

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[176]Which is not to say that this is what he thinks prudence *is*.
[177]Nichols, n. 38, p.263.
[178]See Schmid, p.158.

6(d) - *Re-examining Laches "situation concerning speeches"*

But before moving on, one must attempt to understand Laches' behavior with Nicias, especially in light of his two attempts to "give over" in the conversation. Here it is useful to revisit Laches' "situation concerning speeches".

Recall that Laches began there by saying that when he hears a man "discussing virtue or some wisdom who is truly a man and worthy of the speeches that he is uttering", he rejoices "extraordinarily" upon seeing that the speaker's speeches and deeds are "harmonious with each other" (188c-d). One subsequently learns that Laches will only really listen to a man after he has already pre-judged him worthy on the basis of his deeds. Thus, it would not be an unreasonable surmise to say that what Laches considers "harmonious" is that the words simply articulate the deeds. In fact, this surmise is made practically explicit by his saying that the "things said" must be "suitable" and that the "musical" man lives his life "as a concord of speeches in relation to deeds", not deeds in relation to speech. As Nichols notes, "Laches' concern that a man's speeches and deeds go together to form a harmonious whole reflects a real seriousness of character that is somehow Socratic, even though ***his holding deeds to be more important that speeches (arguments, reasonings) is doubtless un-Socratic.***"[179] This "un-Socratic" stance is the root of Laches' problem.

Essentially, how would Laches know unproblematically who is "truly a man" without thorough reflection on the question of

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[179]Nichols, p. 273; emphasis added.

'manliness'[180]? Lacking such serious reflection, what Laches does when he judges deeds is judge them within the horizon of what he already believes to be good or bad. Of course all people do this, but some will allow a speech to widen their horizon and allow them the possibility of seeing certain deeds in a new light. Surely, this latter alternative is a 'healthier attitude'. But what Laches likely rejoices "extraordinarily" about is hearing his own 'world views' validated: he does not question the *basic framework* of his own opinions.

Nor does Laches' conduct in his conversation with Socrates point against this. For the basic framework of Laches' opinions is not called into question; the conversation takes place well within the limits of Laches' 'cave', and nowhere was that cave itself called into question. What "irritated" (194b) Laches was his inability to state in speech what he still believed he perceived in his mind[181].

Thinking it through, it is likely the case that Laches' admittedly qualified 'love of speech' is more correctly a love of deeds. For when a "true man" (i.e. a man of honorable deeds) speaks, Laches does not bother carefully examining the speech. This is implicit in his saying, "When such a one gives voice, therefore, he makes me rejoice and seem to anyone to be a lover of speech, *so eagerly do I accept from him the things said*" (188d-e). This is not the attitude of a discerning listener.

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[180]Laches may have judged Socrates correctly, but without further experience of the man and solid reasonings by which to judge him, was not this judgment only incidentally correct? For many people who are complete scoundrels in other respects, perform war-like deeds with great valor.

[181]Compounded with the aspect of this being "shameful" which Socrates inserted at 193d.

It is also useful to consider further Laches' 'music metaphor'. He says that when a man and his words are "harmonious with each other" he is "altogether musical," and that "he has tuned himself to the finest harmony" which Laches believes to be "the Dorian" (188d). In his judgment that the Dorian is "the sole Greek *harmonia*" there is an implicit rejection of three other modes of music (i.e., the Ionian, *Phrygian*, and Lydian). Recall that in *Republic* Socrates describes the musical education of their city in speech with special attention to the guardian class (i.e. that class whose virtue was courage) whom he calls "war-making men" (399a). There, while talking about "harmonic mode" (398d), he (like Laches) rejects the Lydian and the Ionian, but leaves the Dorian *and the Phrygian* (399a). Moreover, whereas Laches denigraded the "lyre" as one of the "instruments of play" (188d), Socrates accepts the lyre as "useful for the city" (399d). In *Republic*, Socrates claims not to know which mode is which, but he says to leave one mode to "appropriately imitate the sounds and accents of a man who is courageous in warlike deeds and every violent work" (399a), and to leave another mode that is "not violent but voluntary", and associated with "persuading someone", with "instruction and exhortation" and "acting intelligently" (399b). As Glaukon makes clear, the Dorian mode is the violent mode associated with deeds and the Phrygian mode the one associated with speeches. This being so, Laches could profit from the Phrygian mode which he rejected as not being that of a true man. For if Sparta is in need of reform (as is implicitly shown in *Republic's* 'city in speech'), then the Spartan-like Laches is similarly in need of reform[182].

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[182]The flip-side is that Nicias could likely stand to take in some more of the Dorian

Of course, Laches is implicitly being *shown* all of this by Socrates, a man he trusts because of his proven Doric harmony. However, Socrates likely has a different conception of being "musical" than Laches does. As Schmid explains, "It is not that Socrates rejects the principle of constancy that Laches speaks of--he strongly approves of it . . . [b]ut the principle that Socrates adheres to requires more than practical consistency alone; it requires that Socrates test himself to insure that he is logically self-consistent, in his words and thoughts no less than in his words and deeds"[183]. Thus, concerning Laches education in the 'Phrygian', Socrates does not just let his 'Doric example' do the teaching, but rather, ***his attitude towards speeches*** is one part of the ***example*** through which he teaches -- an attitude which allows ***him*** to listen to and question Nicias because, as Socrates says, "Nicias in my opinion ***is worthy of examination*** as to what in the world he looks to when he assigns this name, courage" (197d). Laches, on the other hand, listens to Nicias with disdain and seems unable to check his indignation, which seems to have emerged mostly from Nicias' stating opinions which did not conform to (and even threatened) Laches' own -- opinions which Laches considered "strange" and "rubbish!" (195a). Indeed, to this point in the conversation there is still the possibility that Nicias will "raise genuinely philosophical issues about what truly is good for a human being. Laches, however, does not see his way through to such profound issues; he simply feels irritation at Nicias, who he thinks is basely wriggling out of admitting his error"[184]. Whereas Socrates will be able to remain steadfast with Nicias, asking him

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mode.

[183]Schmid, p. 91.

[184]Nichols, p.275.

the appropriate questions and showing him that he was wrong, Laches attempts two times to "give over", and this after his saying, "Yes indeed, by all means" that they should not do precisely that (194b). Indeed, Socrates is himself exemplifying in the dialogue the correct "situation concerning speeches". Moreover, there is pedagogic utility in 'hearing Nicias out' inasmuch as even a wrong answer can enhance one's understanding of the problem. Plato evidently deemed Nicias worthy of examination by the very act of making him a character in the dialogue. Presumably, then, Plato intended that *the reader* examine Nicias and learn from him, thereby manifesting 'courage in speech' with regards to Nicias in the way Socrates does, but Laches does not.

The second half of Laches' situation concerning speeches amplifies the points made in the first half. For he began by saying that he has no experience in "Socrates' speeches", but he has "had experience of his deeds", adding that on account of this he believes Socrates to be "worthy of noble speeches and of complete frankness" (189a), and his point there is that those who have proven themselves through their deeds are the only ones who have a *right* to speak on such matters. Recalling that Laches was also courageous at Delium, he too is worthy of noble speeches by his reasoning, reminding one that having the *right* to a speech and being *capable* of it are two different things. One implication of this is that a person could be capable of a noble speech without being worthy of it (i.e., not having the 'right' to it). But does this mean that one ought not to learn from such a man's speech? One sees why this is problematic right here in the dialogue. For Laches listens to Nicias with disdain because he (almost surely) believes him to be unworthy to speak on courage. But in fact, Laches can learn a few things from Nicias: for example, foolish vs.

prudent daring; or even, perhaps, the simple yet crucial point that there might be a relationship between reason and courage that disqualifies animals from the title.

Moreover, recall that Laches' qualification to 'Solon's saying' that "the teacher himself be good", is so that he not be "revealed to be a poor learner by learning without pleasure" (189a). Now, these "good" and "worthy" men that Laches speaks of are men that he already thinks are worthy and good, in accordance with his understanding of the terms. As noted, this is a 'self-fulfilling' position which is hardly conducive to learning. Second, Laches' reference to being a "*poor learner* by learning without pleasure" calls into question his potential for being intellectually courageous[185]. For whatever intellectual courage is, at least part of what makes it a type of courage is its ability to learn and remain steadfast despite whatever pains and fears are inherent to its activity.

Though one might reply that Laches shows intellectual courage in his attitude towards listening to Socrates, this is doubtful for several reasons. Firstly, Laches has never experienced a conversation with Socrates. Had he done so, he might not have been so (over-)confident in his ability to define courage and virtue. But he believes that it is no hard thing for him to state what these things are, thus having little or nothing to fear from Socrates. Besides, he has already done what he holds to be the most important thing he can do, having proven his courage (which he treats as synonymous with virtue), so why should he fear being scrutinized? So it is really no wonder, then, why he will listen to Socrates

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[185]For an interesting and insightful account of Laches' suitability for conversation with Socrates, see Schmid, p. 91-92.

with "pleasure", expecting Socrates' speech to be "suitable" (as he deems it), thus validating the opinions which he already holds. Indeed, that Laches is a "poor learner" when 'learning without pleasure' is arguably suggested right here in the dialogue through his inability to learn from Socrates (and also Nicias[186]) the very lessons which might have saved him and his army at Mantinea.

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[186]The Argive coalition would have done better had they exercised Nicias' 'forethought' as opposed to the rashness which they displayed at Mantinea. Cf. Schmid, p. 158.

"Even the bravest of us rarely has the courage for what he really ***knows***. "

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Twighlight of the Idols***, *Maxims and Arrows* (2)]

"*The art of the moral exceptions.* - An art that exhibits and glorifies the exceptional cases of morality - in which good becomes bad and the unjust just - should be listened to only rarely: just as we now and then buy something from the gypsies but do so in trepidation lest they should obtain much more from us than the purchase is worth."

[Friedrich Nietzsche, ***Human, All Too Human***, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (40)]

7 (a)

The following section is the most difficult and recognizably 'philosophic' section of the *Laches*. In it are the multiple topics of time, becoming, being, knowledge, the relationship of the virtues one to another and to the whole of virtue, the status of the human being in time, and even the topic of good and evil. And it would surely be folly on the reader's part to assume that Plato included these topics haphazardly, without a coherent idea of their connections which he intends the appropriate reader to discern.

As Socrates informs Nicias, they are to start "*ex arches*". That is, "from the beginning" (198a). Socrates begins by asking Nicias if he agreed with what was asserted at an earlier "beginning" (again, "*ex arches*"), namely, that they are "examining courage by examining it as a part of virtue" (198a), to which Nicias replies, "Certainly". Socrates then asks Nicias if he had this in mind when he gave his definition of virtue, to which Nicias replies rhetorically, "How else?" Socrates states as his own opinion that the parts of virtue are "courage, moderation, and justice and some other such things" (198a), asking Nicias if he agrees. Nicias confidently replies, "Most certainly", at which point Socrates says "Stop there" (198b). This is the first of three points Socrates makes.

Socrates' next examines "the terrible and the confidence inspiring things" so that they may agree on the terms. He says that he and Laches believe "that the things that cause fear are terrible and the things that do not cause fear are confidence inspiring and that fear is caused not by past

nor present evils, but by those that are expected"; he subsequently defines fear as, "the foreopinion[187] of future evil", and solicits Laches' approval for this understanding (198b). One should notice that here and later the ideas expressed are Socrates' and that it is doubtful whether Laches has actually given these matters such systematic thought. But Socrates reaffirms that these are "our positions", adding, "[W]e assert that future evils are terrible and future non-evils or goods are confidence inspiring". Nicias, who made no mention either to time or to "nonevils", affirms that it is "exactly" the knowledge of these things that he believes courage to be (198c).

Socrates next suggests that the three men "examine yet a third thing" so that all agree on the issue at hand. Nicias asks what this is, and Socrates, perhaps comically, begins by describing to Nicias how the situation "seems to me and to this man here" (198d). He asserts that, "[I]n regard to things of which there is knowledge, there is not one knowledge about that which has come into being, which knows in what way it has come into being" and a separate knowledge of what and in what way things "are coming into being, as to the way in which they are coming into being, and another about the way in which what has not yet come into being would come into being in the finest manner and will come into being; rather, it is the same knowledge" (198d). Socrates then provides three examples of this: 1) the knowledge of medicine with regards to the "healthful"; 2) the knowledge of farming in regards to "the things that by nature grow form the earth"; and, 3) the knowledge of generalship in regards to "the things relating to war" (198e). With

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[187]Schmid's translation (p.154).

regards to the third example, Socrates asserts that it is on account of generalships' "finer knowledge of the things relating to war" that "it thinks that it must not serve, but rule, divination", and that this is why the law ordains that "the general rule the diviner" (199a). Socrates then turns to Laches, not Nicias, and asks him whether they shall "make these assertions", to which Laches replies, "We shall" (199a). Socrates then asks Nicias if he agrees, not with the point of the general's proper relationship to the diviner (or any of the three examples), but only that "in the case of the same things, the same knowledge understands the things that will be and those that are coming into being and those that have come into being". Nicias agrees, and one should notice that Socrates has reversed the order from its 'proper' chronology of past, present and then future, to the future, the present, and then the past.

On the basis of these three agreed-upon points,Socrates shows Nicias the inadequacy of his reasoning. He begins by having Nicias reassert his definition of courage (199b), and then has Nicias agree on their definitions of the terrible and the confidence inspiring things, though unnoticed by Nicias (but noticeable to a careful reader), Socrates omits nonevils as one of the confidence inspiring things. Having Nicias agree further that the same knowledge pertains to both the "things of the future and of things in all conditions", Socrates gets Nicias to half-heartedly agree that courage is "not knowledge only of terrible and confidence-inspiring things" (199b), because it would then have to understand good and evil in all conditions. Socrates then tells Nicias that his original definition must have been only "about a third" of courage because according to Nicias' own argument, "courage would be the knowledge about pretty much all goods and evils and in all conditions". Socrates

asks Nicias if they are then to change the original definition to this new one, and Nicias complies. Now Socrates gives Nicias his final blow, asking the "demonic [man]" if someone who has this knowledge of good and evil in all conditions, (and Socrates now changes the order to present, future and then past), would "lack anything of virtue" or need anything from either the gods or his fellow human beings in order to "provide himself with the good things" (199d)? The answer, of course, being "no", and this on account of his already having complete knowledge as to "how to associate with them correctly". Nicias concedes that in his opinion Socrates is "saying something", and Socrates makes the radical point that this knowledge of good and evil would be the whole of virtue, not a part, and they "therefore...have not found what courage is", to which Nicias responds, "It looks as if we haven't" (199e).

Looking at what transpired, one sees that -- ironically -- Laches was right. That is, Nicias' courageous man was not a man at all: he is "some god" (196b). Nor did this escape Socrates, who calls Nicias "demonic [man]", as if to say that Nicias must be a god or a demi-god if he himself is courageous in the way he described. For Nicias' courageous man must have god-like knowledge and omnipotence if indeed he has knowledge of all of good and evil. Moreover, this knowledge being not just of what they are, but of how they come about in the past, present or future. Furthermore, the earlier suspicions with regards to Nicias' position were right. That is, courage is for Nicias a matter of forethought, dependent exclusively upon information by which to predict the future in order to act with perfect confidence. Perfect forethought, then, would be a god-like knowledge. In the absence of perfect information, one would require the

aid of a diviner so as to know what to do, and thereby (supposedly) act 'courageously'.

One can begin now to attempt another analysis of Nicias and his position. Notice that Nicias conceives of his courageous man as a kind of craftsman. That this is so is not only in perfect keeping with what is said above, but is implied by Nicias himself. For at 195d, Nicias asks Laches: "But do you give the knowing of this to doctors or to any other craftsman *besides* the knower of terrible and not terrible things, whom I call courageous?" -- as if to say that no craftsmen would have courage *except* the "craftsman" who knows the terrible and the confidence inspiring things. Recall further that Nicias' did not protest the epistemic conflation of his "wisdom" with the "*techne*" of an aulos or cithera-player (194e)[188]. An art of the sort which Nicias describes, then, would have knowledge of both the end and the means. But one problem with this is that one procures goods and suffers evils in a world that is often if not constantly presenting one with new and unfamiliar situations and dilemmas that are (strictly speaking) inaccessible to forethought (i.e., what Plato identifies in *Republic* as the realm of Becoming). In light of the impossibility of such a *techne* for good and evil, one would require access to some principle which 'transcends' the realm of becoming but which is somehow applicable to it. Nicias' 'courageous craftsman', however, has been revealed to be concerned primarily, *not* with transcendent principles of good and evil that are *always* such for a human being, but merely with the 'worldly' goods that his *techne* supposedly enables him to foresee for

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[188]Recall in this respect that a *techne* is a "skill or craft; not far from a science; a discipline operating under clear principles which can be taught" See Bloom, *Republic*, Index of subjects, p.478.

himself in his future. Ironically, Nicias shares the concerns of 'the many' whom he so readily belittles.

Nicias' impossible conception of the courageous man with god-like knowledge raises a question which in turn may provide a fundamental insight into courage: would an omnipotent God have, or even have need of, courage? Upon reflection, it seems he would not. Thus, one sees that what makes courage a virtue for human beings is precisely the fact that they are human beings and *not gods*: an essential part of this difference being that they are not all-knowing, but rather *ignorant* in so many respects. And yet, human ignorance is not a uniform phenomena, being of two basic -- and radically different -- kinds: 1) unconscious ignorance, and, 2) self-conscious ignorance. Unconscious ignorance is folly, while self-conscious ignorance is an honest recognition of one's limitations. One might recall here Socrates' earlier claim that "courage is a noble thing" (192d), and especially so due to the harm which can accompany it. Binding these seemingly disparate observations together into one coherent idea, one sees that it is precisely *the will to act steadfastly (and risk harm) in the face of one's own self-conscious ignorance that makes courage most noble*[189].

Nor does this hold any less for intellectual courage than it does for acts of 'physical' courage. For thinking they know the answers to the highest things when they do not (i.e., unconscious ignorance) renders people 'asleep', as it were, such that they do not seek to know what they falsely opine. To have complete knowledge, on the other hand, is to have

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[189]Which is not to imply that all acts of courage are immediately recognizable as noble or beautiful. More likely, many acts of courage are *not* immediately or manifestly recognizable as such.

nothing to seek, thus having no need for intellectual courage[190]. But self-conscious ignorance can make one 'awake' and can produce in one the overwhelming desire to *know*. Nor does such a one know what awaits him if he were to find the 'truth' which he has been seeking. The truth might be terrible and deadly for human flourishing, or it might be comforting and good. Yet, the intellectually courageous man remains *steadfast* in his activity despite the psychic pains that accompany self-conscious ignorance and frightening possibilities, inspired by the possibility (however remote) of knowing.

Self-conscious ignorance also plays an important role in one's 'moral judgments'. For one can never know with *certainty* if one is doing 'the just thing', for example, if one does not know what justice itself *is*. And to resist action until one knows for certain that what one is to do is good or right or moral is to inflict a total stasis upon oneself (witness Hamlet). One must *act* if one is to procure goods, and though a well-grounded (i.e., reasoned) opinion can serve as a practical surrogate for knowledge, still, to be self-conscious of the fallibility of one's own opinion (since it is *doxa*, opinion, and *not* knowledge) is to require the courage to act despite oneself[191].

Of course, self-conscious ignorance is not an end in itself. For as indicated earlier, one can know the wrong answers without knowing the right answer. Likewise, one can know what he ought *not* to do without knowing for certain what he *ought to do*. Take the example of a soldier in battle. He does not know whether it is truly in his interest (i.e., his

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[190] Again, an all-knowing God would not need intellectual courage.

[191] That is, despite the fear that you may well be erring, even to the detriment of your own soul.

good) to die in any given battle[192], but he might well know -- as well as anyone can *know* anything -- that it would be wrong not to fight, wrong to hand over his land, his family, and his fellow citizens to invaders. This topic of knowing what *not to do* without knowing *exactly* what *to do* is the more interesting in light of the earlier suggestion that Plato is making a point of having his Socrates provide three examples of courage in fleeing (i.e., when he could have written it such that Laches understood the point right away). For does not the courageous act curiously appear as a kind of *fleeing*? That is, that the courageous man flees, as it were, what he knows he ought not to do? But then, what does he pursue? Is it not some thing which he does not know that he ought not to do -- which is quite different than positively knowing what he ought to do?

Witness in this respect Socrates' words and conduct in the *Apology*. For there he says, "[C]ompared to the bad things which *I know* are bad, I will never fear or *flee* the things about which I do *not* know whether they even happen to be good" (29b). Moreover, concerning Meletus' proposal that he be sentenced to death, Socrates says: "What would I fear? That I might suffer what Meletus proposes for me, about which I say that *I do not know* whether it is good or bad? Or instead of this, should I choose something from among the things that *I know well* are bad and propose that?" (37b). Of course, Socrates rejects the latter option, refusing, or perhaps better, fleeing, either prison (37b), exile (37c), or keeping "silent" (37e). Despite appearances, Socrates courageously chose death, that option of which he claimed: "I do not know whether it is good or bad".

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[192]Perhaps in dying nobly for his country he has lost for himself a wonderful and fulfilling future, or perhaps the army for which he fights will surrender the following morning, thus making his own death somewhat in vain.

Notice further that in Nicias' earlier description at 188a as to the nature of his conversations with Socrates, the latter "seems only to point out to him what the noble is *not*"[193], a process which Nicias believes that one should "not flee" (188b). Though one ought not to make too much either of these examples or of the metaphor of fleeing, still they help provide a useful perspective on the problem of understanding courage and the courageous act.

In light of all that has been argued hitherto, it is no wonder, then, why self-conscious ignorance has been an underlying theme *throughout* a dialogue which is ostensibly about courage. Indeed, the *Laches* shows Socrates several times professing his ignorance, as well as imposing some measure of it on two primary interlocutors. It is necessary, then, to bear these points in mind in order to understand the role of 'mind' in courage. Moreover, noticing the importance of self-conscious ignorance goes a long way in salvaging, and refining, Nicias' definition of courage as "the knowledge of the terrible and the confidence inspiring things" – a definition which Aristotle believed worthy of incorporating in his *Nichomachean Ethics*[194].

Consider now another of the puzzles Plato provides in this concluding section (198a-199e). Socrates here obviously alludes to the historical Nicias' catastrophic decision in Sicily. The general who subordinated his judgement to the diviner, resulting in the death and

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[193]Munro, p.47, (his italics).

[194]Though these were public lectures intended for the education of gentlemen, still, it seems somewhat strange to think that Aristotle would promote an understanding of courage which Plato was *seemingly* able quickly to dispose of in one of his dialogues (i.e., one might suspect that the definition has more serious merit than Plato's Socrates seems to give it).

misery of himself and his whole army, is shown here listening to Socrates' that, "the law ordains thus, not that the diviner rule the general, but that the general rule the diviner". Nicias sits quietly, neither affirming nor denying his agreement; and sitting quietly is precisely what Nicias did for twenty seven days in Sicily when he should have been 'fleeing' back to Athens[195]. Moreover, Socrates' conspicuous insertion of "piety" at 199d reminds one of the (traditional) piety which Nicias displayed in Sicily[196]. Its disastrous consequences could be interpreted as a 'criticism' of such piety. Ironically, despite Nicias' rationalistic speaking, one is reminded of his superstitious approach to action.

Indeed, this section elaborates further on Nicias' failings through its references to time. For Socrates asserts his third point with Nicias by meticulously referring to the knowledge of the past, then the present, and then the future. A chronological sequence in perfect keeping with the linear chronology in which humans perceive themselves[197]. But then, at 199a, when Socrates turns to Nicias for confirmation of this very assertion, he reverses the chronology to future, then present, then past, (i.e., "the things that will be and those that are coming into being and those that have come into being"). This subtle reversal of the order makes for a very important insight into Nicias (and by extension his decision in Sicily). For Nicias does not treat the present as a prelude to the future (as the original chronology suggested and as almost every human being

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[195]Having already addressed the relationship between Nicias' 'courageous craftsman' and the diviner in the inquiry, such things need not be repeated here.

[196]And one also sees the contradiction of Nicias' even being pious if he is courageous in the way in which he understands courage.

[197]Whether or not time actually *is* linear is a separate question entirely.

does[198]), but rather, Nicias treats the future -- that is, his anticipations of the future -- as practically a prelude to the present. One can juxtapose Nicias' approach with that displayed by Lysimachus in the second sentence of the dialogue: "Melesias here and I did not tell you *at that time*, however, why we bade you see it together with us, but *now* we shall".

Notice further in this respect the curious addition Socrates makes to the ontological status of the future. For only with respect to the future does Socrates add that knowledge would include knowing how things "come into being in the *finest manner*", (*"hope an kallista genoito"*). So, Socrates is thereby suggesting that things do not simply follow a causally determined course from past to present to future, but rather, that the actual 'future' is a consequence of an inherent striving of the things that are in the 'present'. Socrates has subtly introduced the *kalos* (i.e., the noble, beautiful or fine) as the *telos* of nature, and his subsequent examples point to the fact that human beings participate in bringing about this *telos*, both in themselves and in their environment. Nor should it go without notice that, again, this too has been a subtle theme throughout the dialogue.

But one simply cannot leave this section without pointing out the following: none of Socrates' three examples (medicine, farming, and generalship), strictly speaking, were examples of *knowledge*. For, comparing Socrates' words in the *Laches* with what is said so powerfully in *Republic*, Socrates' explicit talk of time and change is a reminder that

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[198]One might also notice in this respect the chronology Socrates provides in his three examples of medicine, farming, and generalship (i.e., all three start with the present, and hence, subtly emphasize its priority; cf. Schmid, p. 155-157).

he is actually talking about the realm of Becoming (in which every moment manifests unique phenomena): precisely the realm in which there is no knowledge, but rather, opinion. Moreover, concerning its future goods, evils, and nonevils, one has only "*foreopinion*" (198b). For knowledge, if it is to rightly have the name of knowledge, must be of what is and never changes (i.e., what Socrates identifies in *Republic* as the realm of Being).

But has Socrates provided a candidate for which there might be knowledge? And might this be in his subtle reference to the teleological nature of nature[199]? Alternatively stated, perhaps Plato is alluding to *the principle cause of teleology itself* to be the object of knowledge. Whether this be 'the Good', 'the *Kalos*'[200], or whatever, one would do well not to conjecture.

But to fully understand any possible teaching in the *Laches* as to the human being's proper relation to the realm of time and flux in which he exists, one must look at what is perhaps the greatest puzzle of this section: Socrates' insertion and then conspicuous omission of those things he calls "nonevils". That one is to see a puzzle here is indicated by the conspicuousness of its omission[201]. So, why would Socrates have Nicias agree that "future evils are terrible and future nonevils or goods are confidence inspiring" (198c), and then remind him of this very assertion,

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[199]Now one sees why Socrates said to Nicias that he had described "about a third" of what he meant. As Schmid rightly notes, Plato is hardly one to be imprecise in mathematical matters.

[200]As this section seems to imply.

[201]Schmid does not at all take up this puzzle, nor does he make mention of there being any puzzle at all in this respect. Sprague, on the other hand, does note that there is something going on here, (though offering no commentary beyond this), saying, "It is interesting that the neutral cases are cases of hope". See Sprague, n.70, p.45.

saying, "And terrible and confidence-inspiring things have been agreed to be on the one hand future goods and, on the other future evils" (199b)? What happened to "nonevils"?

To start, the privitive word "nonevils" means that these things are *not evil*. Moreover, these things are not simply good or even simply neutral; nonevil could apply to either one or everything in between them. So, Socrates is pointing to something with a quite peculiar ontological status requiring precise naming. It would be folly to think that Plato chose this word (or any privitive word) without reason. Now, when one considers the sequence of events in this section -- the mentioning of nonevils, the 'disguised' speech on the realm of Becoming followed by the omission of nonevils -- is it not a plausible suggestion that Plato is pointing to the realm of Becoming as precisely the realm of "nonevils"? This would go a long way in explaining the curious use of "nonevils" as opposed to "neutrals". For as the section's subtle teleology implies, nature is *not* neutral, but rather, "all things by nature seek their good"[202]. In short, did Socrates conflate "nonevil" with "confidence inspiring" to point out that *the realm of Becoming itself ought to be considered confidence inspiring by human beings inasmuch as it is not evil*? Need one only have the courage to put this into action?

All of which leads one to see yet another failing in Nicias' position. For he presumes that having knowledge of virtue is *sufficient* for being virtuous, and hence, that knowing how good things are procured is sufficient for procuring them. However, as indicated above, and as

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[202]Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, p. 304.

Socrates indicates in his rebuttal, the knowledge alone is not sufficient: one needs to *apply* this knowledge to one's life and this *itself* requires virtues[203]. Alternatively, complete virtue requires one to harmonize their thoughts and their deeds.

As seen, section 198b-199e presents a myriad of puzzles. Due to the very complexity of the issues, one would likely do better to offer suggestions as opposed to solutions, though in any case, aiming to bring out the relevant questions.

7(b) - *Nicias' failure to define courage and the search for teachers*

Nicias admits to Socrates that "it looks as if we haven't" found what courage is. Perhaps at last Nicias has experienced *aporia* (perplexity). Now, when Laches admitted his *aporia* at 193d, Socrates took the opportunity to appeal to his *thumos* and manly pride, telling him that "Courage Herself" would ridicule them if they did not go on seeking for her. But Nicias no sooner concedes failure (temporarily) than Laches re-enters the conversation in order to mock him, saying sarcastically, "And I really thought, Nicias my friend, that you would discover it, since you thought contemptuously of me as I answered Socrates; I had very great hope that, with the wisdom from Damon, you would discover it" (199e-200a). Of course, it is unlikely that Laches considers Nicias a close "friend", or really ever thought "that he would know what courage is".

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[203] Clearly, this raises the topic as to how the 'virtues' relate to one another and to the whole of virtue, a topic already touched upon in the examination. However, due to the complexity of the issue, one would do well not to further discuss this topic without a profound understanding of it. Hence, no such discussion shall be ventured here.

Nor did he have any "hope" that the combined "wisdom" of Nicias and Damon could discover it, his use of 'wisdom' being a sarcastic way of ridiculing the both of them[204]. The conversation has reverted again to a slander contest, as Nicias replies in kind.

Now, Nicias' response to Socrates' announcing 'their' failure to find "what courage is", is still revealing and must be compared to Laches' similar failure at 194 a-b (i.e., Laches *thumatic* response and avowed "love of victory"). Nicias begins by admonishing Laches for allowing his enjoyment of Nicias' failure to completely overshadow what Laches should truly be concerned with: his own ignorance. Yet Nicias' considering that Laches was "revealed to know nothing" attests once again to Nicias' utter failure to see that "steadfastness" is an integral part of courage. Nicias claims that he believes courage to be one of the things "of which it befits a man who thinks he is something to have knowledge", thus implying – if only for a moment, as shall shortly be clear – that he himself might be less of a man than he thinks he ought to be. At this point, Nicias reveals a little piece of 'wisdom', chastising Laches by saying, "In my opinion, then, you do something that is truly human: you look not towards yourself but towards others". This all too human failure which Nicias perceives in Laches is quite perceptive in light of Laches' conduct in the inquiry with Nicias as well as the particularities of Laches' own psyche which have been discerned from the dialogue as a whole (i.e. his obsession with deeds, reputation, honor, and other such).

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[204] As if to call them 'wise-guys' who have noble sounding speeches which in truth are devoid of knowledge or substance.

Unfortunately though, Nicias (who has been associated with hearing others and has been revealed to be a kind of 'information sponge' with respect to speeches he does not truly understand), lacks the ability to apply his 'wisdom' reflexively[205]. He immediately states that he is going to look towards others in order to 'patch-up' any of his mistakes. Moreover, his saying that he thinks that he has "spoken suitably on the things that we were talking about", portrays a lack of integrity, intellectual honesty, and intellectual courage on his part[206]. But most notable is the lack of *thumos* which Nicias displays concerning his failure in the argument, choosing rather to direct his *thumos* at Laches for the latter's taunting. Nicias, so different from Laches' in this respect, appears to feel little or no anger or irritation towards himself -- he never fully reaches *aporia*. He admits that he *might* not have spoken suitably (i.e., "and *if* something of them has not been adequately said"), but salvages no glimmer of intellectual courage, following immediately with the proviso that if he said anything inadequately, he shall "correct it later both with Damon--whom you presumably think fit to ridicule, and that though you have never seen Damon--and with others".

Now, Nicias' subtle chastising of Laches for "presumably" thinking Damon "fit to ridicule and that though you have never seen Damon", is interesting. Socrates never thought him fit for ridicule[207]. But Laches, who trusts deeds over speeches, mistrusts what he believes to be the empty 'wisdom' of so-called 'intellectuals' like Damon.

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[205]Indeed, his attempt to define courage using the speeches of others might cause one to consider him more profoundly guilty of the accusation than Laches.
[206]Unless he means by this that he has 'tried his best' which seems too generous a reading of his words.
[207]Neither here nor in *Republic*, (see 400b and 424c).

Nicias concludes his speech "from the kindly heights of self-satisfaction"[208], with a sarcastically beneficent gesture, saying to Laches that, "when I have securely[209] established these things for myself, I shall teach even you, and shall not begrudge it, for in my opinion you are in very great need of learning" (200b-c). Laches, unimpressed with Nicias' 'wisdom' and beneficence, lets his last derogatory remark go with a passing, "Well, you are indeed wise, Nicias" (200c). He adds that "nevertheless" (i.e., despite Nicias' supposed 'wisdom' and his own supposed ignorance), he will give some "counsel" to Lysimachus and Melesias, namely, that they should look to neither himself nor Nicias as educators for their children. He further suggests that they do what he told them to do "from the beginning" ("*ex arches*"). That is, "not to let this Socrates go", but rather, get *him* to educate the children, adding that he would do this very thing if his children were the appropriate age. Laches has again seen Socrates in action -- this time in speech -- and this apparently causes him to believe Socrates the best candidate as a teacher for the youths. But the problem with this is Socrates' having maintained throughout that he knows no better than any of them about the topics about which they were speaking. So why, then, would Laches think him the best teacher? Might it be because he somehow *intuits* that Socrates is the 'wisest of the group' because of his ability to show others that they are wrong? At any rate, Nicias agrees with Laches that Socrates should educate the youths, saying, "I too accede to these things" (200c). Somehow, Socrates has *shown* himself so "manifestly good" that the men

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[208] Sprague, p. 8.

[209] Again, considering Nicias' passivity both in the *Laches* and in the historical record, this use of the word "securely" is a nice irony on Plato's part.

believe him to be the best teacher. Is it not because he has taught them through example?

But Nicias qualifies his counsel that Socrates educate the young, saying that they should seek no one other than Socrates, but questioning whether Socrates will be "willing". Nicias' suspicion that Socrates might not be "willing" is born of his own experience with Socrates. For as he immediately informs everyone, he has several times asked Socrates to take over the education of his son Niceratus, saying, "But on each occasion he recommends others to me whenever I make some mention of this to him and is himself unwilling" (200d). Recall that it was Socrates who introduced Niceratus to Damon (cf. 180d). This raises an interesting question: why has Socrates refused to take on Niceratus?

The best answer to this question would seem to be found in the *Theaetetus*. For there Socrates, while speaking of his unique method of pedagogy as "mid-wifery" and his students as epistemically "pregnant" (151a), says, "[B]ut sometimes, if I somehow get the impression, Theaetetus, that they're not pregnant, in recognition of the fact that they don't need me, I very kindly act as a go-between and, with allowance made for a god's help, guess very adequately by whose association they would be benefited. And many of them I gave in marriage to Prodicus, and many to different wise and divinely-speaking men" (151b). Recalling that Damon is wise in 'music' and that Niceratus grows up to be a rhapsode, it seems that Socrates' "go-between" art works "very adequately" indeed.

Nicias concludes, advising Lysimachus to see if Socrates will heed him more than he has Nicias. Lysimachus replies that it would be "just" (*"dikaion"*) for Socrates to heed him, since he too would be willing to do

many things for Socrates which he would not be willing to do for others. Calling on justice (with the emphasis on friendly reciprocity), he asks Socrates, "What do you say, then, Socrates? Will you pay some heed and join in our zeal for the lads to become as good as possible?" (200d).

Socrates replies that it would "indeed be a terrible thing, Lysimachus, to be unwilling to join in someone's zeal to become as good as possible". Here one ought to notice that Lysimachus' "zeal" was not that *he* "become as good as possible", but rather, that his *son* do this. Moreover, the use of "terrible" here indicates that Socrates believes it evil -- not just in the future, but at all times -- to deny aid to anyone who seeks to become better when one can be of help. However, Socrates, who never enters an explicit student-teacher relationship, attempts to alter Lysimachus' request. He tells Lysimachus, "[I]f in the discussions just now I had been revealed to know and these two not to know, it would be just to summon me most of all to this work, but now, however, we are all alike at a loss. So then why, and which of us, should someone choose? In my opinion, then, none of us" (200e-201a).

Now, is not Socrates here something less than perfectly frank with Lysimachus? For have the discussions truly shown them to be "all alike at a loss" -- that is, equally in *aporia*? Surely not. For the conversations with Nicias and Laches showed Socrates not only to know the relevant questions, but also to be able to show the men why their answers were wrong. Indeed it was *he* who brought about whatever *aporia* they experienced[210], displacing their mistaken beliefs that they knew what

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[210]However questionable in each case, though most specifically with regards to Nicias, whose *aporia* is *at best* half-hearted.

courage is. This very ability to produce *aporia* in others points to the way in which Socrates' self-conscious ignorance is not an end in itself: he 'knows' the relevant questions as well as the false opinions. Thus, there is a very real sense in which, "in the discussions just now", Socrates *has* "been revealed to know and these two not to know"[211].

Whatever Socrates' reasons for being unfrank and deceptive, Socrates gives the men a "secret speech"[212], saying "For I assert, men -- and the speech is not one to be divulged -- that we must all seek in common as good a teacher as possible, most of all for ourselves, for we are in need, and then for the lads too" (201a). This 'secret speech' of Socrates' raises an intriguing question: why does he think that it should be kept a secret that they are needy and should seek a teacher? Might it be because if such information were to become common knowledge the people of the city would be angered to learn that Socrates holds such a low opinion of them? For if he thinks that he himself, as well as Nicias and Laches (i.e., the heads of the Athenian government) are in need of learning (even more urgently than the lads), what must he surely think of everyone else! It seems that Socrates positively knows ("for I assert") one thing: that he and the others are in need of learning. This knowledge, it almost goes without saying, will not make him universally popular in the city[213].

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[211]Socrates alludes to all of this in using the word "opinion" to describe in what epistemic sense he thinks that none of them should be chosen.

[212]Schmid, p.177.

[213]Of course, according to *Apology*, Socrates spent much of his life *showing* that his fellow Athenians were ignorant, and the resentment this fostered was one of the causes of his trial and execution.

Counseling the men in what they *ought not to do*, Socrates says, "I do not counsel that we let ourselves be in the condition we are now in" (201a-b). Showing that he is not unaware of the type of response he will get from many of the people in the city for this counsel, Socrates adds, "And if someone ridicules us, because at our age we think it worthwhile to frequent teachers, in my opinion we must put forward Homer, who said that, 'it is not good for shame to be present in a needy man.'" Socrates' response to the city's ridicule (i.e., one of its most powerful tools for enforcing its beliefs and norms on its citizens), is to defend himself with its most cherished poet: Homer. But might Socrates' reference to "someone" ridiculing them remind one of the dialogue's dramatic date and the public ridicule which Aristophanes showered on Socrates and philosophy? Recall that part of this ridicule involved the accusation that Socrates was impious and that he taught others to reject conventional teachings about the gods (*Clouds*, especially 250 and 423). However, the Socrates depicted in the *Laches* uses Homer to defend his ways and beliefs, and having done this, he says, "[B]idding farewell to *anyone*[214] who will say something, let us in common take care of ourselves and of the lads" (201b).

Here, reflecting back over the whole discussion, one might ask: why has a dialogue ostensibly about courage been so pervaded by the theme of ridicule and reputation? Indeed, there are five important and conspicuous mentions of "ridicule" and its cognates: one in the very first lines of the dialogue (178b), another in Laches' describing the 'no-win' predicament of a fighter in armor (184c), the central being the ridicule of "Courage

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[214] Again, a curious use of the singular, reminding one of Aristophanes.

Herself" (194a), the fourth concerning Laches' ridicule of Damon and Nicias (200b), and the last one being here, with the ridicule which the men will receive for their frequenting teachers at their age (201b). Added to this is the ridicule *displayed* in the *ergon* (action, or deed) of the dialogue, mainly by Laches and Nicias, and mainly towards each other. Though one might observe that courage relates to deeds and deeds to reputation (i.e., courage generally gives one a good reputation, and cowardice a ridiculous one), this hardly seems an adequate explanation for Plato's threading of this theme throughout the entire dialogue. Is it not more likely that Plato intends to suggest that it is directly pertinent to courage itself? That a *willingness* to endure ridicule in pursuit of something worthy can require a great deal of courage, and that the only ridicule that is *truly* terrible (i.e., an evil rightly and always to be feared) is the ridicule of "Courage Herself"?

In any case, Lysimachus' final speech begins with his saying, 'What you say, Socrates, pleases me. And I am willing to learn with the lads – most zealously by as much as I am oldest" (201c). Socrates' deception and 'Homeric defense' is a success, even having the added consequence of turning Lysimachus' "zeal" towards his own education. Unfortunately though, Socrates' criticism of Solon's saying in *Republic* (536d) is a reminder that on account of Lysimachus' being "the oldest", he will probably learn the least. Lysimachus concludes the conversation with one last request, telling Socrates to come to his house with the rising of the sun so that they may "deliberate on these same things" (201c). For now, he suggests that they break up the conversation. Socrates concludes the dialogue by promising to do the things Lysimachus has requested, "if god

is willing" -- a final reminder that human beings are subject to the frustration of their goals by powers which they cannot control.

CLOSING REMARKS

The *Laches* ends on something of a sober note. Indeed, seen in light of what is known about the persons of the dialogue, one might plausibly argue that it ends in tragedy. Laches will die with his men at the devastating Argive defeat at Mantinea, having not learned the very lessons which might have saved him and his army. Concerning Nicias, his misplaced piety, as well as his characteristic passivity and procrastination, converted one of history's most ambitious political and cultural endeavors to one of the most tragic tales of human folly and suffering. Socrates, who is seen here in conversation with Nicias, foretold the destruction of the Sicilian Expedition with the aid of his *demonic* voice (*Theages*, 129d). Concerning the two old men, Lysimachus and Melesias, nothing is known of the former, but concerning the latter it is only known that he later becomes one of the Four Hundred, the oligarchic regime which ruled Athens for a brief time, and of which Thucydides praises as a "good regime" with a "judicious blending of the few and the many" (8.97.2). Concerning the two youths, something further is told of them: they each become 'students' of Socrates. As regards Lysimachus' son Aristides, he makes great progress while in the company of Socrates, but upon leaving his company, all of his progress "melted away" (*Theages*, 130c). Indeed, Socrates says that he became "no different from anyone" (*Theages*, 130a), a strikingly similar remark to the one he makes of his father Lysimachus in the *Meno*. Aristides came to feel himself a fool, and everyone else thought this of him as well (see *Theaetetus*, 150c-151a). Melesias' son

Thucydides fares even worse than this. For he comes to hold Socrates in contempt, and himself in vain conceit, lacking even the self-knowledge to "know . . . what sort of a slave he was" before he entered Socrates' company (*Theages*, 130a-b).

One question remains to be answered: why is the dialogue named *Laches*? On the surface, several suggestions come to mind. On the one hand, Laches seems capable of acting courageously (witness his conduct at Delium), whereas the dialogue gives little reason to believe that Nicias could act so. Another plausible and related suggestion is that Laches has the necessary (though likely not sufficient) condition for courage: he is *very* spirited, consequently aggressive, competitive -- he admits being a 'lover of victory'. The more 'refined' Nicias, on the other hand, seems too lacking in this regard ever to act courageously. Indeed, whereas Laches is aggressive and favors action over discourse, Nicias is curiously passive and emphasizes speeches over deeds. All of which might explain Socrates' special interest in Laches. Moreover, Laches is publicly oriented, (as opposed to the privately oriented Nicias), with an intense love of honor and for deeds that bring good reputation. Related to these things is his intense 'love of his own', as well as his intense love for the city and what its members hold in *common*. He is a partner of the city, and he is willing to kill and die for it. The city is useful to him -- giving him wars, beliefs, reputation and honor -- and men like him are highly useful to it. In short, politically courageous men and their cities share a common interest in one another.

Indeed, though with due regard for the theme of intellectual courage, the *Laches* is first and foremost about *political* courage. More

specifically, the *Laches* is first and foremost on the ***problem*** of political courage. In this sense, the *Laches* is a probing of the problem of Laches.

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